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THRILLING DETECTIVE

JUNE 1947

# THRILLING DETECTIVE

15¢

JUNE

## THIS CORPSE ON ME

*A Race  
Williams  
Novel*

*By* CARROLL  
JOHN DALY

*Thrilling  
Detective*  
A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

## KILLING TAKES CONFIDENCE

*An Exciting Novelet*

*By* CURTISS T. GARDNER

## THE EGG IN THE BIER

*A Crime Novelet*

*By* A. J. COLLINS

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# THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. LX, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

June, 1947

A Complete Race Williams Novel

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By CARROLL JOHN DALY

*A dead-shot private detective sets out on the simple job of finding a missing will—but murder cramps his style and he has to do some fancy crime-solving in the bargain!*

11

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THE EGG IN THE BIER . . . . . A. J. Collins 66

*Murder strikes down nine victims, and when Jimmy Bristol discovers hen fruit in a casket it looks as though he might be Number Ten!*

KILLING TAKES CONFIDENCE . . . . . Curtiss T. Gardner 80

*Two hundred grand was Jerry Dixon's just for the taking—but in order to take it he'd have to murder a man first, and that was the joker!*

Short Stories

POOR ECONOMY . . . . . Ray Cummings 42

*The killer hoped his crime would put him next to the big money*

TOO MUCH HARDWARE . . . . . Ralph Oppenheim 47

*Ben Turner was ambitious to make like a detective, but—*

MURDER'S NEVER FUN . . . . . Don James 58

*When reporter Alice Reins investigates what's cooking, the heat's on!*

NO DELAY, NO REST . . . . . David X. Manners 94

*Buddy Dell wanted to follow in his policeman dad's footsteps*

DEAD MAN OVERHEAD . . . . . Hal K. Wells 98

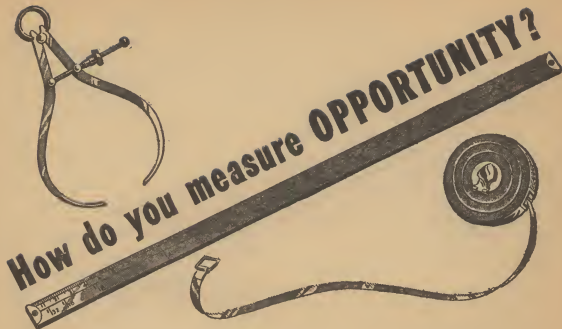
*Marty Glidden believed one stretch in the Big House was enough*

and

HEADQUARTERS . . . . . A Department 6

*Where readers, writers and the editor meet*

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# Headquarters

**T**HE sky is the limit—meaning that the lid is off—and anything is more than apt to happen in those rip-roaring Western oases that are dedicated to the vagaries of Lady Luck.

Of course we are speaking of our modern Babylons, where unfortunate marriages are as quickly canceled as bad checks, and also where a man can lose his best friend—his pocketbook—in a trice at the gambling tables. Yes, and he can win a bankroll, too. It all depends on Dame Fortune, the silly lass with the come-hither look and the shapely gams.

What a scene for a super-detective thriller! Why not combine several wild Border towns and call the result Laros? And then have a Hollywood lovely come calling? And give the stellar role to a handsome private eye by the name of Steve Dix? Why not?

That's what the author of the next featured novelet in **THRILLING DETECTIVE** asked himself, and he came up with—

## MERRY MONTH OF MAYHEM

by  
C. S. MONTANYE

In other words, there is plenty of mayhem in the month of May in Laros, where the divorce mills grind rapidly and the roulette wheel whirls quickly and crime dances fast and furious. The puppets of the underworld are cavorting high, wide, and handsome when Steve Dix arrives in Laros for a talk with Mayor Jonathan Hargen, who represents the new reform element.

"I suppose you're wondering why I sent for you," Hargen asks. "It's about a certain party here in town. Paul Graymar. He operates a place called the *Chantilly* down

Main Street. Ever heard of him?"

"Not that I remember," Dix answers.

## A Community Menace

"Graymar," Hargen goes on heavily, "is a menace to the good name of our community. He has a franchise for his place, but it's a dive. Unfortunately, he's clever and I can't close him up. He's good for two more years. There's nothing I can do about it."

Dix cooled his wrist against the cold glass beside him. Its icy touch felt good.

"What we want," Martin Leach, the city comptroller, breaks in impatiently, "is to get something on Graymar that will let the Mayor move in. That shouldn't be hard. He's as wide open as the range beyond Mt. Baldy."

So they offered Steve Dix five grand—\$5,000—to do the job for them, and he accepted a twenty-five hundred dollar advance, for he was not in business for the fun of it, and he was sure that he could catch Graymar with the goods. But it so happened that somebody caught Steve Dix with *framed* goods before he had a chance to turn around.

## The Missing Gun

Here's what Dix walked into on his way back to the hotel from the mayor's office—

The minute he unlocked the door he knew somebody had been nosing around since he had left the hotel an hour previous.

He stood still and let his gaze wander. They hadn't closed the bottom drawer of the bureau far enough. They must have looked under the pillow of the high mattress bed. The George Washington counterpane wasn't as neat as when he had come in.

(Continued on page 8)

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Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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\*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.



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\*D. E. G., Wausau, Wis.



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\*C. S. Lugin, Okla.



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\*B. E., Prichard, Ala.

\*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

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## HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 6)

He took his suitcase down from the wardrobe's shelf. He opened it and found his gun missing.

And Steve Dix found his automatic had done a murder job. In no other place than Graymar's Chantilly gambling house, where the detective went backstage to call on the proprietor, as follows—

The office door was unlocked. Dix opened it and walked in.

It was a regulation office. A couple of desks and steel filing cabinets kept company with a hooded typewriter on a table. Framed sporting prints were on the walls. A photograph of Jack Johnson mowing down the great Jeffries that long ago afternoon. A picture of Sun Beau, when the horse had been the nation's leading money winner. Pictures of stage favorites, burlesque queens.

Dix saw those things last.

His gaze, strained and taut, slashed to Paul Graymar—to where Graymar lay, half behind his desk, half out on the office floor. The man was doubled up and definitely dead.

Dix moved in closer. A lamp on the desk shed triangular illumination. Enough for him to see the round, dark hole in the center of Graymar's forehead. He studied it, shifting his glance to the pool of coagulated blood the owner of the Chantilly had leaked.

The white coat's shoulder was soaked with it. So was the floor behind the desk. Dix let his eyes sweep on. There didn't seem to be any gun in evidence. There wasn't any. Dix was sure of that after he investigated.

Steve Dix knew that the gun that had done the job—Dix's gun—had been in the hands of the police chief. It was as nice a frame as a gambling town could trump up. And it was all because of a torrid gal from Hollywood, upon whom Steve Dix makes a nocturnal call.

Cappy Tyne was supremely lovely in a lime green gown that was a challenge for all her opulent charms. She wasn't as tall as Ann Madlyn, or, to Dix's way of thinking, as intriguing to the senses. Here was a sort of manufactured loveliness. Too perfect, a trifle too obvious.

She wore no hat. Her chestnut hair cascaded to her shoulders, so sleek and together that no one strand of it was visible from the others. Her oval face, almost gold in the shine of the silver lamps, looked enameled. Her eyes were a greenish-gray, elongated, lazy as a cat's. Her figure was flawless, all the way down, from shoulder to ankle.

She had, Dix knew, come a long way in the past year. Up out of nowhere. A cinematic sensation, a box-office smash. Now the matter of a contract renewal was on Al Karkow's desk. Cappy Tyne was shooting for a high take. So many pictures a year, so much per picture.

Cappy Tyne is a girl with a past—a past which Steve Dix has discovered, and for



which he is paying off. MERRY MONTH OF MAYHEM by C. S. Montanye is a spine-tingling novelet reeled off to the tinkle of ice in tall glasses, to the mad swirl of divorce-town music, and it is perfumed with the gentle odor of cordite!

### A Dwight Berke Novelet

And the next issue of THRILLING DETECTIVE has a second big feature, a hair-lifting mystery novelet with a punch—MURDER IN MY BONES, by Carl G. Hodges.

This is a Dwight Berke story, about those two irresistible and irresponsible newspaper people, Di and Gail, the young couple who chase down murder in its worst degree. Their venture this time leads them to a publishing house for an interview with an editor, but they find nobody at home.

A lighted door across the corridor, marked VANCE GARRITY—The Main Stem was jerked open wide, and a disheveled man with a narrow, bald head and a scratched and bleeding face peered out at them. His fear-crazed eyes glimpsed Gail's camera, and he said—

"The cops must have called you the minute I called them."

"The cops didn't call us," Di said. "We came for an interview with John Cummings."

"Come on in," Garrity said, swinging open the door with his left hand, a derisive smile on his face. "Cummings is here, but he's not talking for publication."

Gail screamed as she saw the body on the floor in front of Garrity's desk. Di grabbed her arm and whispered to her hoarsely—

"Take it easy, sweetheart. We came hunting a scoop, and it looks like we've found one."

They certainly had found a scoop, and MURDER IN MY BONES is a scoop for THRILLING DETECTIVE. It's a story with zip—with snappy dialogue and fast action.

### Three Men in Topcoats

To the two above blue-ribbon winners add another payoff tale—THE THREE STRANGE MEN, by J. Lane Linklater.

Great events always happen in threes, the saying goes, and so THRILLING DETECTIVE runs three stirring novelets in its next issue, about three very strange and shuddering men. This is the way this third unusual story opens up—

Tex Bixby opened his eyes and blinked, sleepily, incredulously. The lamp on his bedside stand had been turned on. He certainly hadn't left it on.

He put out a hand to snap the light off.

But he changed his mind. There were three

(Continued on page 112)

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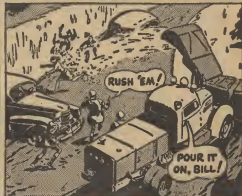
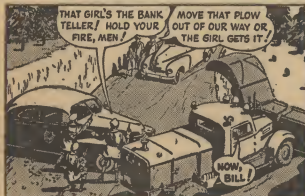
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# Art's Quick Thinking Saved the Day When ...

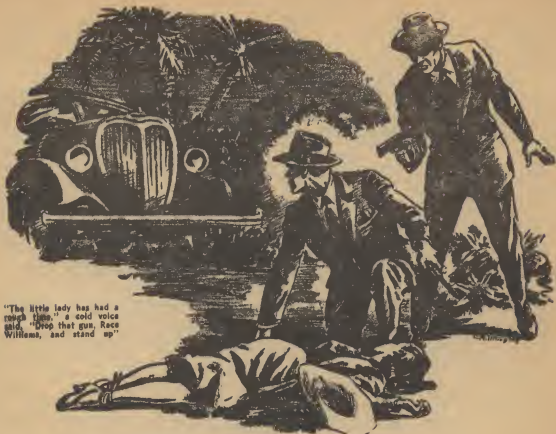
AFTER A NIGHT-LONG FIGHT AGAINST HEAVY DRIFTS TO CLEAR SKYTOP HIGHWAY, ART AND BILL ARE HEADING THEIR POWERFUL ROTARY SNOWFLOW HOMEWARD WHEN...

HELP US BLOCK THE ROAD! BANK BANDITS ARE HEADING THIS WAY!



LATER  
AT HIGHWAY CROSSERS





# THIS CORPSE ON ME

By CARROLL JOHN DALY

*A dead-shot private detective sets out on the simple job of finding a missing will—but murder cramps his style and he has to do some fancy crime-solving in the bargain!*

## CHAPTER I

### BLACK LIMOUSINE

WE made pretty good time but it got colder all the way down from Los Angeles. The bus was crowded even before we reached Riverside, yet the girl got on at Palm Springs. It was up to the driver if he took on pas-

sengers or not when all the seats were occupied, and with this driver it had been decidedly *not*. I had seen him shake his head at the offer of folding money at Banning. But at Palm Springs she smiled at him and he snapped down the jump seat beside him and took her along.

The girl was young and the girl was small and the girl was slim, and people would have turned to look at her in

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A COMPLETE RACE WILLIAMS NOVEL

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Hollywood or even back in Grand Central Station, New York.

The bus hadn't been on its way again over five minutes before the driver must have wished he had taken the cash offer at Banning. The girl still smiled at him and she did nod "yes" or shake her head "no" when he spoke to her, but it was plainly evident that she had put on the gay-little-companion act just for the ride. She had other things on her mind.

Her wrist-watch, at which she looked continuously, was openly one of them. The occupants of the bus were furtively another. She had nice eyes to do it with too. But they were narrowed and, yes, suspicious. But they could be big and wide and brown when they were honestly attentive, such as the time they lit for a full minute on the huge Mexican woman asleep in her seat with three dirty little dark-skinned babies somehow balancing themselves on her lap.

We hit Indio at nine o'clock on the nose. There was the place on Fargo street that was called the 350 Club, and then we passed the Desert Theatre. The town was dead of people and alive with empty cars parked along the curb. We swung back toward Highway 99 and up between the pumps of the gas station that was the bus terminal.

Indio was a fifteen-minute rest stop and nearly all the passengers climbed off the bus. I was almost on the girl's heels as she hit the flagging. Dim lights of the restaurant ahead of me showed clearly the man who sat beside the popcorn machine, plainly the irate Mexican youth who shook the scales that wouldn't work after dropping his penny.

Then down to my left the big black limousine. It caught my eye all right. You don't see many limousines today, even in the city. And this one had its curtains drawn on the side, I could see, and at the front between the driver and the tonneau of the car.

**T**HE limousine attracted the girl's attention too. It was backing slowly, farther into the shadows; as if it had been there for someone to see and then retired into the deeper darkness.

A big man emerged from the back of the restaurant and sauntered in studied indifference across the space between the

station and the limousine which had now come to a stop—just a great block of almost invisible blackness. The chauffeur, or a least the man in the front seat of the limousine, got out and, walking a little way from the car, turned his back to it and lit a cigarette. He remained so with his back to the big car.

The girl moved furtively. No longer the fluffy bit of naive youth of the bus. More like some jungle animal, quick and graceful, yet leaving the impression that she was wandering about. But I had more than an idea she was going to jump that big black hunk. I moved too—leisurely—but toward the same limousine. And still the chauffeur kept his back to the girl and the car and stared hard at the back of a dilapidated building.

I was getting nearer to the car when the big man slipped nicely in between me and the girl. He wore a dirty leather jacket and had an old felt hat on the back of his head. He barred my way and spoke.

"Can't go down that way, buddy. Forbidden ground."

"Forbidden by whom?"

"Oh, by me," he snapped, and then began a man of little patience said, "Come on—before I toss you back."

"And who are you?" I edged closer to him.

A huge paw came out and gripped my shoulder.

"I'm just—me." He laughed, cursed suddenly when I stood my ground, then let his free hand shoot back and up with the evident intention of putting the heel of that hand hard against my chin.

I'm a fair-minded man. You don't have to knock me around to wise me up. You don't even have to strike me. The intention of physical violence is enough. He was so busy with his own little act that he wasn't watching my hands. At least he wasn't watching the right one, or if he was he didn't know what to do about it.

I brought it up from my knee and popped it on the end of his chin and he went down like a thousand of brick. He didn't make so much noise, though, but laid just as still. The girl was opening the limousine door about to get in—starting to draw back, too, I thought—then she suddenly disappeared into the



I knocked his gun hand to one  
side with my left hand, and  
cracked him with my right

car as if an unseen hand had grabbed her and pulled her in. And through the black curtain I thought I saw a light. Anyway I did see the chauffeur turn and, running back to the limousine, jump in behind the wheel. That was my cue.

I didn't feel any special elation about knocking that hunk of beef silly. He was strictly small time on my circuit. Rough stuff is simply business with me.

I was thinking of the business then. The limousine was coming out of the dark and swinging around toward Highway 99, which left me on the far side of the driver and within ten or fifteen yards of the car. That is, I was ten or fifteen yards away when it started to make the swing. By the time it completed that swing and was in almost total blackness I was beside it, had grabbed the knob of the rear door and jerked the door open.

I had been right about seeing a light through the black curtains, for a tiny bulb shone dully. No sound came from within that car because of the roar of the motor—the unnecessary roar of the motor as if the driver were racing it to drown out any sounds.

A man and a woman were struggling. The man had the girl pinned down on the floor. The door slammed closed behind me and I took in the little bit of melodrama. The man was holding the girl by the throat all right. I could see the whiteness of her face, the blueness of her lips, the wideness of her eyes. I saw the two slender hands that tore at the man's wrists, and then only one as her right hand dropped back beyond my vision. And all the time the motor raced and roared.

FOR an instant the man's right hand left the girl's throat. Where he got the knife or how he could produce it so fast I don't know. It looked as if the blade jumped suddenly alive in his hand. He fairly hissed words at her now.

"You nearly bit my finger off, you little rat!" he said, and there was pain as well as fury in his voice. "If you have the will or not, I'll kill you anyway."

The knife moved and I reached for his neck and his right wrist at the same time. I gripped them and held them, but

didn't jerk him back. I didn't get a chance. There were one, two, three shots in quick succession and he jerked himself back.

I lifted him off the girl and pushed him up against the door. The girl was lying there, her hair mussed. The little doodad that served as a hat was crushed and more off her head than on it. I hardly recognized her. She seemed much older, for one thing. For another her lips were slightly twisted at one corner, and her eyes—those childish brown eyes—were thin slits with the hardness of marble shining through them.

Or was it more glassy? And was what I saw horror or abject terror? She came to her knees with a quick staggering movement to slip onto the seat beside me. But she wasn't looking at me. She was looking down at the man by the door—the crumpled dead figure.

I took the gun out of her hand, a snub-nosed automatic. Then I looked down. The man was a well-set, broad-shouldered lad. His back was against the door, his head sunk forward on his chest, his fedora over his face, almost down to his chin. His topcoat was hunched on his shoulders, his jacket had flopped open and on his white shirt a hunk of crimson stood out.

Blood? But blood didn't stand out that way. I pulled in my breath. A thought went through my head that would have gone through the head of every detective in the city of New York, seeing what I was seeing, even seeing it out there in the middle of the desert three thousand miles from Broadway.

The great hunk of red that wasn't blood was as big as a half-dollar but it wasn't as flat. It stood out like—like a stone, a crimson stone. A ruby—a fine and perfect ruby.

I let the girl slip down upon the car seat. Then I leaned over and lifted the man's right hand, pushed back his sleeve, saw the white cuff and the splash of red as big as a quarter this time. A cuff link. I ran a thumb along its smoothness, along the big red smoothness on his chest. No kidding now. It was a ruby—or a good imitation of one. A mighty good imitation.

I couldn't believe it. Yet I had to believe it, or at least I had to find out. Call



it fantastic. Call it impossible. But I bent down and, putting a hand on the fedora hat, pushed it slowly back. The square jaw, the sharpness of teeth that should have been yellow—yes, and were yellow. The full thick lips. I shoved the hat all the way back.

Maybe I gasped, even though I was sure before then. This man at one time had been one of the biggest racketeers New York had ever produced. For a while he had gone down hill until he had nothing left but that exclusive little apartment hotel called the Terrace. Late-ly he was getting some money some place, strutting again on the Avenue.

Many had died gunning for him. And now a slip of a girl out in the lonely desert had squeezed a small slender finger on a large caliber gun and blasted him right out from behind his prize ruby. Yep. If you know your way around you guessed it.

The stiff was "Ruby" Klegg.

## CHAPTER II

### A BODY ON THE ROAD



**I**F KLEGG had any other first name I never knew it. He signed his checks that way. It was said he'd had his name legally changed to Ruby. You could spot him a mile with those stones; especially when he went in for evening

clothes.

I looked at the girl. She was cuddled there in a little heap, her hand stretched over the seat close to the door. She hadn't fainted. Her eyes were on me, but they were not narrow slits now. They were growing wider and wider.

The driver quite evidently had not heard the shots, since they had come when the motor had been racing and backfiring. The car moved along easily through the night now. I sat back and looked down at Ruby Klegg and thought and wondered where he fitted into the picture. The picture—the reason I was there in the desert with Ruby Klegg who had died somewhere south of Indio. And the picture flashed back.

Things had been dull for me. Then a millionaire of fifty-odd, Bertram C.

Howe, had died at his desert home. He had left a will made three years previously leaving everything to his wife, with the exception of twenty-five thousand dollars to his brother, a five-thousand dollar bequest to a small college—Coleybury College—and lesser amounts to old servants and employees.

The hitch was that just before he died his nurse had seen him draw up a new will entirely in his own handwriting, and two old servants on his desert estate had witnessed his signature. My job was to find the missing will, not a dead body. I was employed most confidentially by a most dignified law firm which represented the interests of Colebury College. Somehow they had the idea that the money had been left to them. And somehow the dignified lawyer had the idea that the nurse might know something, and he wanted me to get that knowledge from her. The suspicion all around was that the widow had copped the new will.

Why me in such a job? Why pay the price that I charged? Well, the senior partner of the law firm put it to me this way:

"I understand, Mr. Williams, that this nurse has certain information. If she could produce—er—discover this missing will and it greatly benefited the institution we represent that institution would consider it a great service. If the will cannot be found, that this nurse, Miss Burton, has knowledge of, and if she is willing to go on the stand to swear under oath to a knowledge that shows an intent upon the part of the deceased to make the college his chief beneficiary—then of course we could pay you handsomely. You understand such testimony would not and could not be paid for, as our firm could have no hand in anything that even suggested bribery. But an honest woman—you know."

"You want me to bribe her personally?" I had horned in then.

"No!" He had jerked erect in his chair. "I want you to induce her to tell the truth. It might prove difficult if other interests attempted to induce her to lie. Of course, under auspicious circumstances, we would expect to pay you a satisfactory fee for any extra—er—er—difficulties you encountered."

So had spoken Edward August Castle of the firm of Castle, Bradrick and Castle, but he had never even hinted that one of those difficulties might be the dead body of a former notorious racketeer.

And where could Ruby Klegg fit into the picture? Surely, he didn't expect to inherit any money out of it. Yet he had wanted the will. Why?

I thought maybe I knew why. There was only one person—well, perhaps two—who would just as soon that missing will didn't show up. One was the widow, of course, and the other was the brother who inherited twenty-five thousand dollars. But the brother was Addison Howe, the former noted painter, and he would hardly want or need. . . Then it struck me. Former noted painter. Sure. Today he could be broke.

All these thoughts flashed back through my head in seconds—less maybe. I looked down at the dead man again. I looked at the girl crouched beside me on the seat. She was stirring now. Fixing her hair. Watching me out of eyes that still were widening, eyes that were very bright. And I saw that her lips were not thin red lines but parted and generous, and that her teeth gleamed white. What was more, she seemed to be slowly growing younger while I watched her. The wrinkles, which must have been simply frown lines, were going quickly out of her forehead.

She was not in an enviable position. If she knew where the will was, now was the time for her to tell me. If the dead Bertram C. Howe had confided in her about the new will and she held the clue to the intent, now was the time to get that information from her.

SHE spoke first and her voice did not tremble. There was a slight foreign accent to it that I won't try to put over, but it was not hard to understand and it sounded nice the way she used it.

"He's dead," she said. "Was it wrong to kill him—for that—for what he was going to do—to me?"

"Legally or morally?" I didn't browbeat her or didn't coddle her. I wanted to see where we stood first. "Where did you get the gun?"

"It came into my hand," she said, and I guess when I stared like that she understood. She hurried on. "From under his coat it slipped, and then—well, there were black spots before my eyes. I don't remember. Did you shoot him, or did I?"

"Lady"—I grinned at her—"is that a nice way to treat a friend? Don't you know?"

"Spots—they came before my eyes," she said. "I don't remember. Later perhaps I'll remember, one way or the other."

"You or me, eh?"

"Yes, I will try and remember. You jumped into the car. And then I thought you came to help me."

"You know why I came. It was to be arranged that you meet me at the bus terminal. Instead you crawled into this—this hearse." And then the big-hearted act, for after all it isn't any too pleasant for a young woman to be held for shooting strange men. "I'll help you, for that will, for—for. . . Well, helpful testimony about that will."

"The missing will again," she said. "Everyone wants that will. An unknown cousin from Tennessee, a little fresh-water college in some place in the East. . . Oh, did I do anything wrong?"

Anything wrong? I shot forward and made a lunge at Ruby Klegg. The girl had leaned against the door and it sprang suddenly open, though I'd have sworn she must have given the handle a twist first.

I might have had him, too, if she hadn't grabbed my arm.

"No—no, let him go. We do not want him. See—he does not want us either."

She was right. Ruby Klegg took a sudden back flip and tumbled out on the road. I saw his body twist, turn over in the soft sand and fold itself neatly in the deep shadow of a telegraph pole. Then we were out of sight—and I slammed the door.

Almost at once the car slowed down. It didn't stop suddenly. The driver seemed to hunt for a special spot. If so, he found it. We bounced gently off the road. The black hulk swerved slightly and the tires settled and the car stopped.

I leaned up and unscrewed the light bulb.

"I'll do the talking," I said to the girl.

"The driver's coming around for a look-see."

I couldn't see her face, but I felt her stiffen beside me.

The door opened, our driver stood there.

"What's wrong?" he demanded. There was a rough command in his words but it didn't register in his voice. There was a quiver to it.

"Why, what should be wrong?" I asked, and held my revolver on the blackness.

"Oh, you're there." He seemed relieved. "And the other one—the woman. I want to see her. I have a flash."

"You let that flash loose in here and I'll shoot it into your carcass," I told him.

"I wouldn't shine it on you," he said, "and if it's that way you want it she can hide her face. I didn't look at you when you got into the car, did I? And I didn't look at her either. I—I wasn't paid to go—to murder."

"What makes you think someone was murdered?"

"I thought I heard a shot a bit back." His voice wasn't any better now. "Now—well, like a body tumbled from the car, and the door closing and—and I thought maybe she tried to jump out."

I sat back feeling better. So the driver had not seen the man who got in his car, nor the girl either.

"You didn't hear any shot," I told him. "And you didn't hear any falling body. The door blew open, if that's what you mean. At least it was on the latch and I opened it and closed it tight. The girl is here. You know what you were paid for?"

"Yes." He gulped. "I was paid to let the girl jump in the car and for—for you to convince her she should take a ride with you." And when I didn't answer right away his voice shook slightly. "I identified you, sir, through the other half of the bill you left on the seat—thank you—but I want to see that other passenger. I know she got in, like I know you got in—sort of by back glancing." And as if quick explanation of his peeking, "Just the figures of a



I popped my right on the end of his chin and he went down like a thousand of brick

man and a woman, nothing more." A dumb sort of frightened guy he was.

I LAUGHED. I couldn't help it.

"Hide your head, Mabel," I said simply. "The driver wants to be assured of your presence. He was paid too much and misunderstands our little rendezvous." And I added quickly, "I'll use my flash."

The girl ducked low, holding her arm over her face when I shot the pencil of light on her.

"That's enough," said our chauffeur. "I can tell by the way you talk, mister, that you don't belong in this part of the country. Neither do I. I'm from the city, back Riverside way. I'll be driving you on to your appointment. Can't waste too much time. I—er—borrowed this car like I was told to. I got to ditch it before the chauffeur finds it out."

I thought of the dead body back on the road, of the explanation I'd have to make to the police. The coincidence of my riding in the same car with Ruby Klegg and maybe the girl saying she didn't do it.

"Okay, buddy," I told him. "You hitch-hike back to Indio. The young lady and I will drive on alone. Now."

"No—no." His voice shook. "I can't. He wasn't small time like us, boss. He was big city stuff. Said he'd stick a knife in my chest if I didn't show up."

He was reaching for the door as if to close it when I turned up my collar, pulled down my hat and stepped out of the car. I wasn't going in for an argument. Even if there wasn't a lot of traffic we were on a main highway. Besides, I didn't like that "small time" business.

"Okay," I told him. "Take your choice. A knife in your chest when this big timer catches up with you, or a bullet in your chest right now." He staggered slightly back, so I took advantage of his fright and swung him around. "Start walking," I said. "On the other side of the road so I can see you better. And don't look back. Just keep going."

He did and I watched him.

Why did I want him on the other side of the road? Well, a car wouldn't see that body. A hiker wouldn't either for that matter, unless it was a hiker who

had a body on his mind. But he kept going. His head erect, his shoulders straight, like a soldier's on parade—the end of the parade maybe, for his knees weren't too steady.

Five minutes later I got behind the wheel, had the girl climb in beside me. I was glad to see so little traffic on Highway 99. Then swung the car around and headed south again.

"What now?" the girl said.

"Well, it's like this," I told her. "There's a body lying down the road that we've got to pick up and move inland some place. It would take a lot of explaining."

"You're—doing this for me?"

"For you and me," I told her flat. "I'm out to find a missing will, and I think you're my lead to it. I don't want you out of circulation right now. It would confuse the situation if you and I were occupying different cells trying to explain that corpse. Besides," I added truthfully enough, "I'm not sure what sort of story you'd tell."

"If I shot him or not?" she said. "I guess I don't know what I'd say myself. I don't know how my memory would be at the time. I—well, there those—"

"Sure," I nodded. "I know. Those spots before your eyes. How do you feel about him now?"

## CHAPTER III

### HANDS ACROSS A GRAVE



THE girl looked at me a long time. I could see the whiteness of her face, feel the steadiness of her eyes. She laughed nicely, pushed close to me, and took my arm through hers. I could feel hair brush against my cheek.

"If we are not going to try and explain the body what does it matter?" she said. "You are being very kind to me, I think."

"You don't have to be kind to me."

I shoved her off a bit, then pulled up in the darkness. I felt a little jump in my throat. Did I see that body lying there by the pole plainly because I knew there was a body there—or was it that plain?—or didn't it just look like a

shadow on the road. And shouldn't I let it lie there for someone to find?

But lying there, found there? I couldn't chance it. Ruby Klegg in Indio. Race Williams in Indio.

But I don't have to talk myself into things. I backed the car up quickly off the road and alongside that pole, and the shadow that curled half around it.

"I—I'll help you," the girl said, as I opened the door and slipped from behind the wheel to the roadside.

"No," I told her. "It's a quick job."

It was. A minute later I slammed the rear door closed, brushed off my hands, for the dust was thick, and found the girl behind the wheel.

"The keys," she said. "You took them. I drive. I know this country."

"Yes, I took them," I admitted. But I didn't add that I took them for the very reason that I was afraid she knew the country too well and would be driving over it while I was lifting up the body. But I handed her the keys and let her drive. I'd rather watch her alone than both her and the road. Three minutes flat after we had stopped we were off again.

You think that fast? It was. Ruby Klegg was heavy, too. But it wasn't the first body I had handled in a hurry.

"Now—off the main highway?" the girl asked. "And you'll want a shovel." When I didn't answer, she said, "Well, you didn't just pick him up to carry around. You can't leave him in the open fields—the police—the coyotes. Surely you bury him. Far off here no one will ever know." And almost sweetly, "Then you and I will not have to remember what happened in the car, and all my life I will love you very much. Though there was not much harm in it."

After I recovered, I said with some sarcasm:

"You got a shovel in your handbag?"

"But no," she answered quite seriously, and then, "You joke. Yet I know where there is a shovel, and I know where there is big date garden, and so the ground is not too hard on top if it is done before dawn, and underneath. It is for a strong man like you nothing. Then the days and the months and years pass and we forget. Is it not so?"

We were moving along the road now,

had turned right where the sign read Sandy Corners. She drove well, too. I was thinking it over. And I guess I was about to say, "It is so," but instead I said:

"Step on it."

I caught the lights in the rear view mirror before I heard the siren screech. Then the police car turned too, skidding around the corner, straightening out and on our tail.

"It's a big boat," I told her. "Give it what you can. A dark lane, a quick stop, and we'll run for it. If you know this country no one will find us."

"The American Gestapo," she laughed. "I will handle them." The car crept along.

"And the body in the back?" I said frantically, as the police car pumped up on us. "Step on it!"

"No—no, they can't know." Was she telling me or was she trying to convince herself? "They can't know, and if—if . . . Duck down in the seat. Like I am alone."

It was in my mind, even in my hand, to push a gun against her side and order her to let the car loose. But I didn't know if it would work. In fact, I had an idea it wouldn't work. Anyway, the police car had screamed alongside, was pushing us off the road.

I ducked down on the floor of the car. I was wondering what her "if" meant. And I had an unpleasant feeling that "if" meant that if they found the body she would lay no claim to it.

"What are you doing on this road?" I heard the voice of the cop say. Or words to that effect.

And I heard the girl laugh and say:

"But Officer, what other road would I be on?"

There was talk in between, then the officer said:

"Well, you've brought excitement to the valley anyway, and, and I don't mind saying we all wish you luck with—with—" A pause. "I shouldn't be talking like this at a time like this."

**T**HEN the police car sped away and I climbed back up on the seat.

"It was very funny," the girl said. "I could have laughed. The officer said if he wasn't alone in the car he'd have

climbed in the back and seen me safely home."

"In the back?" I gasped.

"Yes," she said. "Such respect for my years and my position in life."

She knew the country all right. The car turned into a narrow side road, ran along it for half a mile, shot down a dusty lane that would hold one car, stopped. She pointed at a little shed and hopped out of the car. I waited, but I had my gun in my hand. Pretty soon she was back out again with a shovel. One shovel.

She handed it to me, climbed in behind the wheel and without a light on the car began backing and straightening out again. Then we were off, going slowly and smoothly along two well-defined ruts in a date garden.

These were good-sized date palms, for I could see the ladders against the trees. She was talking.

"Tractors have been through here, of course. We follow the wheels, make no new tracks. So we swing here, down this way. And straight away. So this is a good spot. We bury him here."

Eerie? I guess it was if you want to look at it that way. But I hauled the body out of the car and carried it over my shoulder, walking along the tractor treads. I had given it thought and made up my mind. The body had been tossed around too much to tell a straight story to the police. And I—well, we had let ourselves in for it once we lifted the body back in the car, and once when we let the cop stop us and go on his way.

"About here?" she asked and answered her own question. "Good. It is not too cold now. The ground will be soft until around five or six o'clock in the morning. Here is the shovel."

Just as simple as that. Just as indifferent as that when she should have been lying in a dead faint with me giving her smelling salts. Even remembering that she was a trained nurse didn't seem to make any difference. She was more like an undertaker.

Through the palms the stars shone down, but they gave little light. I guess they were too far up. I never saw so many stars.

I dug. The ground was soft. It was almost like a child digging in the beach

at Coney Island. And all the time the girl sat on the ladder that leaned against a tree and picked herself dates and spat the pits into her hand.

"No evidence," she kept explaining.

After I had carried the body over and dropped it in and filled up the hole she came and took the shovel and patted down the dirt. She stirred it up here and there with ridges so it would look like the rest of the ground.

"It is right," she said at length. "Pickers they come and no footstep of ours remains. The wind it move the dirt about . . . Here, I picked some dates for you. But first, we shake hands over the grave. Is it not so?"

It takes a lot to throw me. I think I was thrown then. But I took the hand she stretched to me across the grave. I couldn't help it. I guess she gripped mine.

"Now," she said, "we are partners. I have killed the man and you have buried him."

"No spots before your eyes then?"

"No," she said. "He is dead and buried, and let that be the end of it. It is better to forget. I always forget the unpleasant things, and remember the good things. There are so few that one must cherish the thoughts."

"What's your name?" I asked impulsively, as I took the dates from her. "I mean, your first name, Miss Burton?"

"Miss Burton, no less. My name is Ziggle. You—" She paused. "I think you may call me Ziggle."

"Ziggle?" I said. "I never heard that name. What does it come from?"

"Oh, a little French, a little Polish, perhaps some Czecho-Slovakian, and maybe—then the United States mixes it up and it comes out Ziggle."

"You are from Europe—Poland maybe?"

"Maybe. But that is the unpleasant thing I forget. Look. I will take you home with me and you will question me, because that is your business. Perhaps also it is your business to try and hurt me?"

"If you tell the truth, nothing can hurt you," I lied easily, as we got into the car and she drove it.

"Bah! That from you. And we bury a dead corpse together. They accuse me,



though not yet legally of stealing that will. Do they believe the truth?"

"I just want to know what you know about it. You nursed him and . . . What's the matter?"

**B**LAMED if I didn't think she was crying. Even to this day I don't know if she was or not. There was, though, a catch in her voice when she asked:

"Whom do you represent?"

I gave it a thought then I told her.

"The college."

"No!" She jarred straight up behind the wheel and stared at me. If it wasn't that ruts held the car we'd have been off into the date trees. "How stupid."

Suddenly the car swung, dashed into the dim light from curtained windows and we were in a gravel driveway. We came to a stop. Before us a bungalow was nestled, if you like it flowery, among the date palms.

The girl hopped out and so did I. She almost ran toward the door. I stopped dead. Sure, I knew it was a gun stuck into my back, and a voice spoke—not a voice of the desert, by any means, but the voice of a distant city.

"Not so fast, buddy," the voice said, and when the girl, almost at the door, swung around, "Sorry lady. He's a stranger to me, and he isn't going in with you until I get the word."

"That's all right, Ziggy," I said. "I'll be with you in a couple of minutes. Go in if there isn't any personal danger to you. I'll join you in a couple of minutes, like I said."

The girl hesitated, stood there.

I turned. There was enough light for the man with the gun to get a look at me. His eyes widened, his gun wavered from side to side slightly—and I did it. I knocked his gun hand to one side with my left hand and brought my right hand in and out from under my own armpit and cracked him under the chin with it. He just had time to utter a single name. It was a nice name. I sort of liked the sound of it, and the fear in his voice.

"Race Williams," he said simply.

He fell to his knees and, toppling off the little porch, rolled out into the patio.

I knew him, and I didn't know him. That is, I knew he was a private detective with not too good a reputation back

in New York. But his name escaped me, if I ever had heard it.

The girl stood wide-eyed.

"Like that." She nodded emphatically. "He calls out your name and faints. He was afraid. I saw it in his face."

He had a right to be afraid. When lads stick guns in my back I assume they intend to use them and do my best to use mine first. But then I remembered that dick as a key-hole listener, a dumb-waiter juggler, and a window-peeper.

"Miss Burton," I said, and she smiled at me pleasantly, "I take it from what this guard said that Mr. Addison Howe has visitors inside who are not to be trusted. People will try to bribe you to get information about that will. People will even—well, someone tried to kill you this afternoon. Now I can walk in with you and put the dampers on the show. Or I can listen in some place, and give you any help you may need when you need it."

"Yes, yes." She seemed to be thinking. "It will be that lawyer and the phony philanthropist who is interested in the cousin. There. The French windows—thick drapes. I will unlock the window, push it open. It is in an alcove with a piano. Close the window quickly when you get inside. The cold air may tell your story. See—the windows there, around the corner of the house."

## CHAPTER IV

### VISITING RACKETEER



**I**GGIE went in the door and I slipped around the corner of the house. The French windows were there. I waited, listening, not watching. The curtains were thick, and hardly any light came through.

I didn't hear her spring the lock on those French windows. I waited, tried them, and the windows gave. I heard the murmur of voices.

The curtains were thick, as I said, and the baby grand stood a bit into the room. I slid inside and closed the window. People were talking. One voice was high and squeaked.

"Mrs. Howe," it said, "of the present

moment everything is in the manner of a civil action, an attempt to trace a missing will. Miss Burton here nursed your husband through his last illness. You are the only one who could have taken that will. Miss Burton may point the accusing finger at you. I warn you, Mrs. Howe, my patience is exhausted. I would proceed with criminal prosecution."

I had edged along the curtain and could see into the room. The bald-headed bird with the squeak looked the part of a small-town lawyer who had taken to drink and was letting his laundry suffer to buy more liquor. He was at a table with a pad before him. To his right was a woman of about thirty-five. She looked cold, efficient, determined, and mostly interested in herself. This woman I took to be Mrs. Bertram Howe, the widow, though she was not in black.

I moved around and saw Ziggy. She was leaning on the far end of the piano. A man beyond sat with his feet crossed, and a cigar in his hand and that was all I could see. The back of a large comfortable chair hid the upper part of him.

But the other occupant of the room I could see plainly. He wore a blue dressing gown with white stripes—a dressing gown, mind you. Under no circumstances, no matter how down to earth you are, could you take it for a bathrobe. His face was young, but his hair was snow-white and his eyes were the brightest blue I had ever seen. There wasn't a wrinkle on his forehead. His carriage, his apparent ease and indifference, were perfect.

The man of the cigar and the legs spoke. He addressed the white-haired man.

"Mr. Howe," he said, "your name and your reputation are nation-wide. Mrs. Bertram Howe is your sister-in-law. Why not advise her to tell us all she knows? Why let this reach the public and the press and the courts. My friend, Miss Claudia Ramson, the cousin from Idaho, would not make any complaint. Indeed, she might make a settlement. But advise your sister-in-law to produce the missing will."

The white head turned slowly, the blue eyes glimmered. The man opened his mouth and spoke softly.

"But my dear sir," he said, "I have no right to this bungalow I occupy now. To be sure, my brother let me use it during his life, but I am here now on the sufferance of Mrs. Howe. I regret that she is not interested in my advice."

The feet moved. The cigar and the hand disappeared and the man I hadn't seen stood up. And I got shock Number Two. The man was "Smiley" Henderson. And if Ruby Klegg was a has-been along the Avenue, Smiley Henderson was a comer.

Two New York racketeers on the desert on one winter's night is hardly a coincidence.

"I think," Smiley said, "I will advise Mrs. Howe myself."

He didn't go over and stand in front of the woman on the bench. He walked straight over toward the piano and stood in front of Ziggy. And what's more he said to her:

"Mrs. Bertram Howe, I am going to stay here tonight. All night if you do not speak." He stretched out a hand and took her wrist. "You can't get the police very well because we might convince them that they want you more than you want them. Now I want to know where you put that will."

"I think," Addison Howe said, as he came to his feet, "that you may be hurting Mrs. Howe's wrist."

"Of course not!" Henderson smiled over at Addison Howe. "If there is anything Mrs. Howe doesn't like about my actions she can telephone the police."

Yep, all this conversation was going on while I stood there in a daze. If I had been surprised before I had sure been tossed plenty by this time. Ziggy was Mrs. Howe! I didn't believe it at first. I could hardly believe it now. Yet Smiley Henderson thought she was. Addison Howe, her brother-in-law, thought she was.

"Get out of my house," she said suddenly.

"There is a phone," Smiley said, almost gently. "Why not call the police?"

"Let go of my wrist!"

"There's a phone. Why not—" And Smiley stopped talking.

**ZIGGY'S** free hand came up and smacked him across the face. She

was small, yet she struck hard. Yes, and she struck viciously. It rocked the six-foot-two of Smiley Henderson. It rocked him inside too. His face went purple, all but for the white finger marks that stood out plainly on his cheek. For a moment I thought that he was going to strike her. But he didn't.

"Mrs. Howe," he said. "I want to talk to you alone, in a quiet spot. There—don't be foolish. You'll be glad you listened. Come."

He put a hand on her shoulder and I could tell by the expression on her face that his fingers bit deeply. So I stepped from behind the curtain, and was between them before Smiley even realized it. I hit his arm up so hard that it bent him backward and put him into a half-kneeling position like those living statues you see in the circus. He just stayed in the pose too, staring at me.

"You heard what the lady said, Smiley," I said. "Get out—all of you."

"The police—" He started to mouth the words. "I—Williams—Race Williams, this is a surprise."

Smiley wasn't any cheap hood. He didn't exactly turn pale. For a moment I guess he whitened around the gills, but his color came back at once.

"Imagine you hollering for the cops," I said. "Why, if I started them off on your record they'd be months following it up before they had a chance even to question Mrs. Howe."

Smiley Henderson was standing up straight now. But he favored his right arm a bit. He was strong. He kept himself in good physical shape, but jamming his arm stiff up like that wasn't in

his exercises and he felt it. But he held his temper.

Smiley was a dangerous man. I knew that. But Smiley was a smart man, too. And if it came to shooting it out with me Smiley would much prefer to do the shooting into my back.

"You represent the Howe interests?" he said. "Why, that's incredible."

"He represents the college," Ziggy jammed in.

"The college." Smiley jerked his head up higher. "The college. Why, that—that's funny." And he burst out laughing, real laughter, too. No doubt about that.

"Smiley," I said, "I'm representing myself now. Come on—get out, all of you. I don't like guys who manhandle women."

"I gave her a chance," Smiley said. "I was doing what I did for her own good. She's got that will. Because no one else could have it. I won't wait long for action. I'm at the Date Palms Hotel in Indio, Race. Get in and see me, and talk to Miss Burton. It'll do you good."

I hesitated a moment, then said:

"I have business here first. Sit around and I'll come and see you. A half hour—an hour." And when he moved toward the door, "There's a playmate of yours lying outside in the patio."

"Of course." Smiley nodded without rancor. "That's what I like about you, Race. You're so forthright." He spoke a last word to Ziggy. "You listen to Mr. Williams, Mrs. Howe. You couldn't be in better hands. Good night."

He was the last to leave, closing the

[Turn page]



... ITS QUALITY

HITS THE SPOT! ★

door gently behind him.

The white-haired man with the kind face and the bright dressing gown turned to the girl.

"You didn't tell me, Ziggle. Sit down, Mr. Williams. Really your fame"—his slight smile took the sting out of it—"or your notoriety for giving clients protection is well-known."

"You and Mrs. Howe, then, are good friends?"

"Why, she's my sister-in-law." Addison Howe raised his eyebrows. "She wouldn't lend me a cent if that's what you mean, and she told you how broke I am. But we are in agreement that the present will presents few difficulties. You see, it leaves me twenty-five thousand dollars which I can use, and Mrs.—Ziggle here—a fortune which I am sure she will learn how to use, or at least how to spend."

"Then," I asked, "neither one of you would be anxious to have the lost will found?"

"The alleged lost will," Addison Howe corrected me. "Ziggle could hardly profit by such a document, and I . . . Well, it is bandied around among the ever multiplying legal talent that my brother was not entirely satisfied that I wasn't simply a wastrel."

"You mean your brother rang up his lawyer about changing the will, and directed them to cut you off with a dollar."

"Yes." He smiled. "That is indisputable, I believe."

"But they never drew up that will—his lawyers?"

"Oh, yes they did, but my brother never signed it. As a matter of fact, he called them back and told them to tear it up. But I presume you are familiar with that."

**I** WAS. I knew all the details.

"But," I said, "right after that your brother made a will himself. Was he still displeased with you, and did he make it after having a row with his wife?"

"You didn't know my brother, Mr. Williams. He never permitted such a thing as a row. The servants heard loud and insistent talk on my brother's part while his wife, Ziggle, was in the room with him. Miss Burton, the nurse,

makes them loud and bitter sounds. But Miss Burton has not put that in an affidavit yet. She is an opportunist, Mr. Williams. I don't know if you go in for bribery, but there is a thought."

"But she saw your brother draw up a will."

"She says she watched him write it."

"Then you deny that he made another will?"

"Why, no. He told the servants it was a will. Malcom, who had been with him years, was one of the witnesses. One could hardly doubt Malcom's word."

"And what do you think became of the will?"

"Oh—" Addison Howe shrugged, and the gesture was artistic more than theatrical. "He no doubt destroyed it, as he had his lawyers destroy the other one."

"Addison." Ziggle came over and sat on the arm of his chair and ran long slender fingers through his hair. "Mr. Williams represents the college."

"I know," Addison Howe said simply. "He amused us greatly tonight, and besides, he is entitled to any information he wants. Let's make it easy for him. Isn't that your idea about the will, Ziggle?"

"I am not interested," Ziggle said. "My husband adored me. One will or another he would have taken care of me."

"There." Addison looked up at me. "You see now both parties who would find a new will perhaps inconvenient."

"And," I said, "who realize the seriousness of concealing or destroying a will."

"Quite." Addison nodded. "I wouldn't think of such a thing. I am afraid it is a most difficult problem." He turned to the girl. "Tell me, Ziggle—it has been such an exciting and charming evening—where did you meet up with Mr. Williams?"

She shrugged.

"At the bus station. Miss Burton was to meet me there. I wanted to talk to her. She was to be waiting in my car. But she wasn't and Mack was missing from behind the wheel and—well, Mr. Williams had been kind to me on the bus—recognized me, of course. He wanted to talk to the nurse also, and to you, so I drove him out here."

"He recognized you twice, didn't he?"

Addison grinned. "Mack, my dear, was drunk again. He telephoned that the car had been stolen and that he had been lured—yes, I believe his word was lured—into one of the card rooms in Indio. Imagine, Mr. Williams. Open and legal card rooms in Indio. Like an old-time Western thriller, isn't it?"

"Who is this cousin that Henderson and his lawyer represent?" I asked. "What's to that?"

"I wouldn't know." Addison frowned. "The lawyer seemed a rugged individual, or perhaps just an individual. I don't recall the cousin, but then one wouldn't. They don't say it, understand, they don't even hint it, but I gather that my brother might have written her that he was leaving her money. Else why their interest. Certainly the man you called Smiley seems hardly the type who would go around righting wrongs and spending money without compensation." After a pause, he suggested, "Ziggie, why not—to put it very bluntly—hire Mr. Williams to watch over you?"

"I am already engaged in the case," I said swiftly. "And why would Mrs. Howe need protection?"

"Well"—Addison Howe sat up straighter and became more serious—"maybe I'm seeing too many pictures or reading too much mystery, but this outfit tonight seemed rather as if they might go to extreme measures to extract information if they really thought Ziggie was hiding the will. Certainly everything seems to center around her. You'd be in on the ground floor, so to speak. She could pay you handsomely. Couldn't you, Ziggie?"

I ignored him. "May I borrow your car, Mrs. Howe?" I said to Ziggie. "I want to drive in and talk with the troupe who were out here. I'll return the car, send it back in the morning."

"But you'll stay here?" She came over, put both her hands on my shoulders, and looked up at me. "You find out things. You ask questions. In the night maybe you search the house and the grounds. And I get the protection free of charge. For if you are here and I need you, then you have to protect. Is it not so?"

"I'll see," I told her. "I'll come back anyway."

"You'll be back in a couple of hours—maybe less. Take the convertible. I show you."

## CHAPTER V

### WHY SHOULD SHE DIE?



HOWE came to his feet protesting. "No—no," he said quickly. "I have the key to the car. And I give better directions. Besides, Ziggie, you would be apt to ride in with him, and that he would not want." He glanced at me. "A child of Nature, isn't she?"

Addison talked on as, holding the flash in his hand, he led me to the garage, the door of which was open.

"We lock nothing in the desert," he explained and chuckled. "No one does. It is so safe. Nothing but Ziggie's life is in danger. I think you should watch over her."

"She is fond of you—you are fond of her," I said.

"Of course." He rattled on. "I was surprised at my brother's marriage, but I said nothing to him. Somehow one never said anything to Bertram. He was that way. In my silent way I scoffed and sneered at the marriage. She hates me for it. If she had five million dollars and I was starving she would not help me. Odd people here tonight . . . Take care of yourself."

Just before I drove away, he said:

"Rather fun, isn't it, the envy and greed and hopes of men, the vicissitudes of life. I could make a few thousand dollars in a morning, not so far back, but the touch, you know, the divine spark—it burnt out suddenly. Just like that. I couldn't make a nickel with my brush now. Though I did paint the chairs in the kitchen. Good luck—not a nickel from her, not a nickel from painting. Well—well . . . Fun, isn't it? Rather."

I was gone then. Following the direction he had given me. The car was a honey, a long, low-hung job with all the trimmings.

I had time to think going into town. It was clear now how Ziggie had fixed it with the cop. Naturally she had been

driving her own car, and since she lived on the desert part of the year and was big money she was known.

As for me, I had been told I would meet the nurse, Miss Burton, in Indio. She might be late. She might even get on the same bus I was on, but I was not to try and identify her. There might be people who wouldn't want me to meet the nurse. Or she might have changed her mind and wouldn't bother meeting me. The change of mind, I understood, meant she might have been bought over.

So Ziggy was the widow of the multimillionaire, Bertram C. Howe. I had heard something about the widow, but only in a general manner. Bertram Howe had married her abroad a few years back either before we entered the war or in the early part of it.

That she was much younger than he was, I knew, but I hadn't thought she would be that much younger. The lawyer for the college had said she was old enough to want the money, and young enough perhaps not to deserve to get it.

"Rather fun," Addison Howe had said. And hanged if he hadn't seemed to mean it. A great painter a few years back—less than that even—his work always in demand, his price—well, he had practically named his own figure.

That Ziggy Howe needed protection there seemed little doubt. Witness Ruby Klegg, the careful, sure Ruby Klegg down on the desert. Ruby had come a long way down the ladder, yet I think he had scraped up enough money to hang on to the Terrace Hotel.

And Smiley Henderson. Where did he fit in? The only answer I could get to that was that by chance he had heard that Bertram Howe was leaving his money to his distant cousin. So Smiley had got hold of the cousin, and no doubt there was an agreement that she would give him half or maybe even more of the money.

Where could Smiley have heard that? Through the nurse most likely. He must have been pretty sure. Look at the broken-down lawyer he had hired. For despite what the brother and wife thought about the unknown cousin, a dying man might in sudden anger as a vicious gesture of his hate and disapproval leave all his money to this unknown cousin.

Or to the college, for that matter. Perhaps the college thought so, too.

I asked myself, was Ziggy capable of hiding or destroying a will? I didn't have to think over the answer. She certainly was.

Was the nurse capable of hiding the will?

Well, she'd had the chance. And if she could make a nice piece of change out of finding it, I guess she would. She wouldn't destroy it. I don't think any woman would destroy it, not even Ziggy. Women generally keep things like that well-hidden, of course, but with an unexplained, perhaps subconscious feeling that it is an ace in the hole if things go wrong.

**T**HEN I was in Indio. There was plenty of space for me to park the car. I swung up the steps and entered the almost deserted lobby of the Royal Date Palm Hotel. Not a bad little place. I say almost deserted, for Smiley came out of a seat and met me before I was halfway across the lobby.

"Glad you made it, Williams." He lifted my hand, shook it, then put it back at my side where he found it. "We know all about each other to begin with. You take an innocent job of hunting a lost will and come across me. Then you try to connect this up with pinballs and horse-racing or some big city racket. You see danger to Mrs. Howe. But I want exactly what you want and nothing more. I want that missing mill. This is no place to talk, though. Come up to my room." When I hesitated, he laughed. "Good glory, Race, you're not afraid?"

"I wouldn't be afraid of you any place, Smiley," I told him, and followed him up the stairs, down a corridor and, of all places, into the bridal suite.

"Look it over, fellow." He clapped me on the back. "I may have to bring the little cousin on here. Want to treat her right. Sit down. You think maybe I wanted to get tough with Mrs. Howe. Well, I did. But not any tougher than the police will get, and I won't put her in jail for five years at the end of it. Sure, I'd have scared the devil out of her to get that will." He grinned. "And so would you. If there was enough dough in it for you."



"How much dough is there in it for you?" I asked.

"Plenty." He threw back his head and laughed. "I'm not posing as a philanthropist, Race. This little cousin lady has signed up a good tight agreement with me. It wasn't drawn up by that Riverside lawyer I picked up either. He simply makes things look legal. We find the will. It's in my client's favor, so she gets the money. No legal tangle there."

"You feel pretty sure she gets the money. Why? And why do you want to talk to me?"

"I only play sure things," he said. "How do I know? That's my business." He frowned then. "It's like this, Race. I don't know what arrangement you have with that college. But they can't afford to pay you much if they don't collect. Now you come down here—and show up nice and friendly with Mrs. Howe. The college hasn't much dough. I'm not blaming you, boy. Mrs. Howe will have plenty if the missing will is never found. You might arrange that it is never found. You might even find a witness who saw Howe tear it up, who even heard him say he was making a new will giving Mrs. Howe everything. Then my client or anyone else can't show intent upon the part of the dead Bertram Howe when the will isn't found."

"You think I'd commit perjury?"

"With over a million involved? Don't kid me, boy."

"So you think I might switch clients and fix the nurse?"

"I've got a statement from the nurse," he said emphatically. "But she's a smart woman. I can pay only if the will is found. Mrs. Howe can pay if the will isn't found. I don't think the nurse has the will. I do think that Mrs. Howe has it. Still has it. She was the only one who could get it."

"Couldn't Howe have got out of bed and hid it away himself?"

"Sure he could. He was up and around until the night he died. Heart trouble, you know. But his lawyers were out at the estate after he died. They nearly tore the house apart looking for that new will. It's a big house, about four hundred yards from the bungalow the brother uses. The brother was in New York when Howe popped off, so that

leaves Addison out. Nothing was burnt in the fireplace, no torn document found in the trash. Nothing to show that Howe tore up the will, everything to show that he kept it. And that she took it."

"And I can see the nurse now?"

"Too bad. Smiley shook his head. "She took the car and went off to see some relatives in Banning, or Beaumont, or some place."

I grinned. "So the only reason you wanted me to come to Indio was to tell me that you suspected me of switching from the college to Mrs. Howe. And you've hidden the nurse so I won't buy her over. Even knowing me you're a bit afraid, or pretending to be, that Mrs. Howe will buy me over if she hasn't done so already. Now what else?"

"Well"—he rubbed at his chin—"I know you won't work for me. But if you're straight, Race, you might pretend to help Mrs. Howe, discover the missing will, and—" He ducked his hand in his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills, dragged a grand note from inside and tossed it on the couch. "That," he said, "is my honesty of purpose. A donation to the common cause of you finding the will and turning it over to the proper people—the lawyers for the estate of the dead Bertram C. Howe."

"Even if it won't favor this cousin?"

"No matter who it favors."

"You must be pretty sure, Smiley."

"I'm certain," he said. "Take it. You'll owe me nothing. Maybe I'll owe you a lot." And when I let the thousand lay there, he said, "Get that will, Race. If it shoots the works or most of the works to this cousin, I'll slip you ten grand."

I SHOOK my head. Funny that, because I'm not high-minded as a rule. And I certainly did intend to turn that will over to the proper people if I found it.

"Keep it, Smiley," I said stiffly, for I was tempted. "I take one client at a time."

I started to leave him and stopped.

"Smiley—" I said. I was just going to tell him, warn him not to shove Ziggy around. But I didn't. It would more than ever convince him that I was going

over to her side.

"What?" He waited, and I simply shook my head. "Okay, Race. You're a funny guy with a funny racket. But show up with that will, and I'll slip you a little gift that—" He paused and laughed. "Well, that will put a new wing on the college if you're so noble-minded."

That was all. I left him then. I went down stairs. Certainly it would seem that Smiley Henderson was sincere enough about wanting that lost will. If he killed Ziggy that wouldn't get it for him.

Why did I think he might want to kill Ziggy? Why, because Ruby Klegg had wanted to kill Ziggy and naturally I had connected Ruby and Smiley up together. Certainly it would be far too much of a coincidence to have the two of them mixed up in the same case, with different interests. Yet—

And suddenly it struck me. There was only one will in existence today that was worth a hoot. That was the will in which Ziggy—Mrs. Howe—inherited the entire estate. But if she was dead, who would inherit?

I went straight to the phone booth and called up the lawyer in New York who had hired me.

"Yes, of course I read the will," he said. "No, no. I'm positive that there was nothing in it for the college if Mrs. Howe died."

But he didn't know if the cousin would get it, or who would get it. He didn't even know if Mrs. Howe had the power to will the money or if it was in trust until she died or reached a certain age. Of course he had a copy of the will but it was at his office.

"What?" he said. "Get it this time of night? Impossible!"

"You've got to get it!" I laid it hard on the line. "A human life may depend on it."


I knew that "human" part was corny, but he was half-asleep and it sounded melodramatic and it did have an effect on him. He arranged to get in touch with one of his clerks in New York. He lived in White Plains himself. And if I would call back he would let me know.

I told him I would call him in an hour or so, and hung up just as he was getting

wider awake and asking how the interest of the college was developing.

## CHAPTER VI

### FROM DESERT DARKNESS

URE I had a lot of things to think about on the way back to the Howe ranch. But I didn't think about them. I like things to develop and then do my thinking and my action right on the spot when they turn up.

I recalled Addison Howe's paintings. None of this arty stuff. His simple desert scenes. What color! He must have made a fortune. In all the national magazines—double page spreads too and often paid for by some big advertiser. They said he could name his own figure.

And now—well, he had burned himself out. That was the verdict I had heard. But he had been tops in his profession. When I hear of an artist and remember his work he has to be good. I don't go in for art.

I swung off Jackson Avenue, did the correct turn, and was coming down the narrow but paved road that the Howe estate faced. Then I made a mistake. I turned in too soon. I knew as soon as I hit the softness of the road that I was not on the gravel of the Howe entrance. But I saw the lights of the bungalow ahead and to my right and got an idea.

I switched off the car lights and came to a stop. I was back pretty early. Maybe if I nosed around a bit I'd learn something, perhaps run across that dick Smiley Henderson had along with him.

The stars were still bright. There were thousands of them. But they cast no light, at least no light down on the ground. It was all upstairs. However, the little road was not hard to follow and I went easily along it toward the bungalow. I did see a little better. One's eyes do get accustomed to the darkness, even the desert darkness.

I paused as I neared the bungalow, to get my bearings. I guess I must have been smack in the center of the desert. Mountains all around me and all about the same distance apart excepting those far distant toward Indio. Some of them

looked phony. Especially a small one that looked like a piece of scenery. Then those mountains, like a chain, getting higher and higher—distant black things.

Enough of the view. I remembered the French windows and wondered if Ziggy had thought to lock them again. If not, it might be interesting to know what she and Addison Howe talked about, if anything.

It was pitch black there against the bungalow. Little light showed through the thick drapes by the windows. I pressed close, gave a gentle push. The window swung in. A voice reached me, low, inarticulate. I stepped inside and, taking Ziggy's former warning about the cold air, pushed the window closed. It slipped back without a sound.

I edged closer down the room, by the piano.

"Addison, your brother is dead," Ziggy was saying, hardly breathing the words. "I need you so much. I love you so much. He would want you to have me. I am so alone."

"Ziggy, Ziggy," Addison told her, "if it were anyone but you who talked like that—"

"Yes, yes." She ran in on him. "People would say we marry so soon. Look at me, Addison. I served your brother faithfully. I was in a way a creature of his whims. I did make him happy, Addison. You know that. You loved him so, like a brother loves a brother, only in the books."

"Yes," he said.

I looked through the curtains and saw his face. His lips were not smiling now but were tight, and his blue eyes were slightly blurred. Ziggy was standing in front of him, both her hands on his shoulders and her eyes were big and wondrous. Why didn't he just grab her?

"Yes," Addison said again. "You made him happy, Ziggy. Very happy. It was a strange romance for a man like my brother. You saved his life in Paris, and—"

"No, no, that is not so. He saved my life and I belonged to him. He took me and he married me and brought me to America right after my mother died. Look, I am still young. Scarcely twenty-five yet. And I am so alone in this land

where your brother's friends did not want me. I am very rich—you are very poor." And suddenly putting those arms around his neck and lifting herself up on her toes until her face was close to him, she said, "Look, Addison, we get married or I will not give you one cent!"

I THOUGHT he was going to crush her in his arms. He had more will power than I would have had, or would have wanted to have had for that matter. He pushed her away, threw back his head and laughed.

"Ziggy," he said, "you live in such a different world."

She laughed too, shrugged her shoulders.

"It is the way of America," she said. "Money, money, money. But you tell me you are an artist, that you live also in a different world. So we live in that world together. We forget other people, we see alike."

"No." He smiled now. "I do not see spots before my eyes."

"Oh," she said. "Those spots they are of convenience. I will not see them if you do not want it so. You make me as you want me. I have seen life and death that you have never seen, that you can not understand. I was very young in years, but very old in living. I see dead in the streets, dead in the trees, dead hanging from the windows. I see piles of dead. Once I walk in our cellar and there are six bodies there, but not seven. I laugh and shout with joy because the seventh would have been my mother."

She was running on almost furiously now.

"Is it strange then that I am different from other women? The German officer he kiss me and hold me and I scratch at his eyes, and he say it is me or this knife and takes me in his arms. His lips are warm and sickening against my face. Ah, Addison you do not like that. You pale so slightly. But me, I choose the knife but I choose it for him not myself. I stick it in him—once, twice, three times. He dies and I—"

Slender shoulders went up and down with almost indifference.

"I was very, very young and America is not yet at war, and your brother come and he raise the devil because he has

much money, and no one is sure and he swears I was with him. I say I belong to him. And so I did."

"As simple as that." Addison spoke half-aloud. "He never told me that. I knew it was bad, Ziggy, but not how bad. You never told me either."

"We forget all that, your brother tell me. So I put it out of my mind, but sometimes at night it is there, and Ziggy does not laugh." She turned suddenly then and left him.

I moved, too, opening the window and passing into the night. What had I learned? I had learned that Ziggy had killed before, but I might have suspected that from the easy way she had shrugged off the killing of Ruby Klegg. And I had learned, too, that there must be thousands of girls—maybe tens of thousands—just like Ziggy, who didn't shrug it off, couldn't shrug it off. And I learned that Ziggy could not only dish it out but that she could take it, had taken it.

Five minutes later I had swung the convertible through the Howe entrance, and came noisily down the driveway. I jumped out of the car and banged along the little porch of the bungalow.

Addison Howe opened the door and let me in.

"You must be half-frozen," he said. "It's down to thirty-eight. It will hit freezing before morning. Dawn is the coldest part of our day. Go over by the fire." He pulled up an easy chair, sat down in another, lit a pipe, and crossed his legs.

"We are having quite a time, Mr. Williams," he said. "But don't think I resent the interference. Or should I say the interest of these outside parties in my brother's money. It is inconceivable that he would not take care of his wife, Ziggy. He adored her. And as for myself—he smiled—"I knew he would think of me. I believe he left me this little house, too. I'll be here most of the time now."

"Painting?" I asked.

He looked at me for a moment. Not shrewdly, just as if he weighed the question.

"I'll daub at it," he said then. "I don't care to talk about—my painting. You may understand. Now, Mr. Williams,

Malcom is here, and his wife Augusta. They witnessed this will which so many think is lost. Do you wish to question them?"

I shook my head. "I rather imagine that has been gone into. I am paid simply to locate the will. There is no doubt that it was drawn. What do you think became of it, Mr. Howe?"

"I think my brother tore it up. A whim of some kind, and even if he didn't, Ziggy and I wouldn't have to worry."

"Suppose it did turn up?" I asked him. "And suppose he did leave you out of it. Would you contest it? Unsound mind? Undue influence?"

"Nonsense!" He laughed. "I never knew a sounder mind. I never knew a man less likely to be influenced by anyone or anything. I would not contest anything my brother wished. And I am sure Ziggy feels the same."

PERHAPS, I thought, but I was not sure.

"But your brother and his wife had a row, you know," I reminded.

"I don't know," Addison said firmly. "My brother did not row. He did not permit of argument. He may have been giving Ziggy some advice. He might even have been admonishing her rather loudly."

"But," I objected, "he did intend to cut you out of his will when he called his lawyers that day."

"He must have had some reason which he may have felt was for my own good." When I sat up and stared at him, for that was a lulu, he went on, "He thought I could paint again if I had to. He may have meant it as an incentive. Poverty, you know. Perhaps he wished to frighten me." Again that kindly smile. "Yet I have always contended that an artist can do better work on caviar and champagne than on beer and pretzels. Then, of course, in fear that he might die suddenly he never signed that will."

He got up abruptly.

"We are going to offer you the living room here for the night," he said. "It will be warm, and that couch makes a comfortable bed." I guess he noticed my look of surprise. "We have only the two bedrooms and the small room off the kitchen which Malcom and his wife

share. My brother's big house is far back. We've closed it up since he died." He crossed to the window. "A lovely place," he went on, pulling back the shades as if he could really see out. "Nearly a hundred acres in dates. Over fifty in spinach, another fifty in carrots. We lost the beans in the early frost. The rest is rough desert land, except for the pool and lawns. He liked to have it that way."

"I may have to use the telephone later," I said. "Long distance."

"It is there on the desk." He waved a hand toward it. "Ziggie, I believe, has retired. She had a trying day I understand. I do not know how you and Ziggie met." And when I said nothing, "Ziggie is not like other women. The passing of a loved one to her has been more of an everyday happening than a tragedy never to be forgotten. She is not callous, Mr. Williams, though my brother's lawyers think that. They do not understand that in Poland she walked among the dead for days and nights. There were weeks, perhaps months, when the dead were closer companions to her than the living."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I think she may need protection. I don't know from what. But I am sensitive to impending dangers or disasters. I felt it when my brother passed away, though I was in New York. She was devoted to my brother. She thought I disappointed and hurt my brother when I ceased to produce works worthy of my former skill. It is not Ziggie's fault that she feels about me as she does."

I waited but he didn't continue.

"How does she feel about you?" I asked.

"She does not like me, Mr. Williams. I won't say that she hates me, but detest might be the word. Good night."

Then he too was gone down the little hall.

What did I think of that? Well, what do you think of it? After the act I had just witnessed it stunned me at first. Then I thought that love is close to hate, they say, and what about a woman being scorned? But Ziggie didn't strike me as a woman who would be scorned so quickly, if she wanted something. If she

wanted Addison, she would go after him and take a couple of scornings without batting an eye.

There was no bed made up for me. Just the wide couch, a dozen or more pillows that I could toss off on the floor. The fire was still going strong. I looked at my watch.

Not quite twelve o'clock. A lot had happened in three hours.

How long would it take the lawyer back in White Plains to telephone, get his clerk down to the office and then have him read the will to him? All I wanted to know was who inherited if Ziggie died, and if she had the right to will what she got. And that lawyer—you'd think I had got him out of bed at the crack of dawn.

Then I remembered the difference in time. It would be three o'clock in New York. I would wait another half hour and then give him a buzz. Surely an hour and a half would do the trick. You see, I was trying to fit Ruby Klegg into the picture.

I PUT out the lights, not knowing if someone could see in from outside and maybe take a pot shot at me. Why? I don't know why. But people had taken pot shots at me before. Surely they would do it again if they thought I had anything to do with depriving them of a few million bucks.

Why not? I'd probably take a pot shot at someone myself.

I half-dozed.

My hand was under a pillow, the gun close to my hand.

It was about a quarter to one when I snapped on the light again and called White Plains. I got my lawyer almost at once.

He had started to read the whole will when I stopped him.

"Just tell me can Ziggie—er—I mean Howe's widow dispose of by will the money her husband left her?"

"Of course not," he said at once. "It's in trust. Mr. Bertram Howe's attorneys, Blake and Blake, a very reputable concern, are trustees."

"Okay," I cut in. "And if Mrs. Howe dies who gets the money?"

"Addison Howe, of course."

I almost dropped the telephone.

## CHAPTER VII

## CARBON MONOXIDE



ADDISON HOWE inherited if Ziggy died. So that was why he didn't think the idea of marriage so hot. Sure he might marry her and chisel some of the dough out of her. Or he might not marry her and have nothing. Or if she were dead have it all in cash. Cash on the line. Her death would give him a great fortune.

"Take it easy, Race," I said to myself. "Addison Howe is the last person in the world who would kill. And if he did kill her and got the money he would be the first suspect."

I went over to the fire and sat down and started to think it out.

After all, maybe I could fit Ruby Klegg into the picture. Maybe the trouble was that I had never believed in coincidence and it would have been quite a coincidence to find Smiley Henderson and Ruby Klegg both down in the little town of Indio and each there unknown to the other and for a different purpose.

Smiley Henderson was there to collect most of the money that would come to the cousin if the new will should be found. Ruby Klegg had been there—well he could have been there to kill Ziggy Howe so that Addison Howe would get the money if the present and only will was the legal one.

But Addison Howe would need an alibi. It was a sure thing he would have had one if Ruby Klegg had rubbed out little Ziggy in that big black sedan. Witness the people sitting around his house. A nurse, a racketeer, a New York detective, a bum lawyer and two servants.

Well I'm not a guy to let grass grow under my feet, or carpet either for that matter, so I went straight down the hall looking for Addison Howe's room.

I tapped at the door.

"Come in," he said almost at once.

I opened the door, let my flash slip into the room and got a good break as the panel of light lit on Addison Howe. He was reaching over to turn on the little lamp beside his bed, and he was also slipping something under the pillow.

"Really, Mr. Williams," he said. "Not anything wrong?"

"Not at all."

I went over and sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at his keen sparkling blue eyes, his touseled hair so white, his young face almost boyish.

"Mr. Howe," I said, "you asked me about giving Mrs. Howe protection. Do you still think she needs it? Do you still want me to give it to her? Or would you rather say after something had happened that you tried to get her protection. That I wouldn't take the job."

"Good heavens!" His eyes opened wide. "What good would that do if she were dead?"

"Why do you think she needs protection?"

"Well—" He licked at his lips. "There are those who think she has a later will and they might do anything to obtain it."

"No other reason?"

"What else but money?"

"All right," I told him. "I'll protect Ziggy. And if anything happens to her I'll get the men if it's my last living act."

"Nothing must happen to her," he told me. "You see, that's why she is staying here. That's why I don't want her out of my sight. Nothing can happen to her while she's here with me, near me."

"You mean that gun under your pillow?"

He reddened slightly, then laughed. It was a nice laugh too.

"I guess I'm not very clever, am I, Mr. Williams? Still, I wouldn't have to know much about a gun to stick it against a man's back and fire. But I want the gun to keep anyone from dragging Ziggy away from this house. From me. I can't explain it, Mr. Williams, but I know that nothing will happen to her while she is with me, if people know she is with me. Sounds stupid, doesn't it?"

It did, and it didn't. It sounded to me as if he were trying to keep himself from getting the opportunity of killing her. That he knew he would be blamed for it. Or a strange quirk of mind. A man perhaps trying to prevent himself from committing murder.

"I am rather confused," Addison



Howe was saying. "My little world of indifference has been slowly toppling around me. Perhaps I have lived wrong. It is time maybe that I pushed life."

He sat up then, tossed back the bed clothes and stuck his foot out, reached over and lifted a robe from the little chair. Standing up he slowly put it on. He was a fine, handsome man—no mistake about that.

"It is over an hour since I looked into her room," he said. "I want to be sure she is there."

"What would make her leave? Why would she leave?"

"Why does the wind blow?" Then he got down to earth. "Ziggie is unpredictable."

**WE WALKED** leisurely down the few steps to the end of the hall and he carefully opened the door at the right. A cold breeze hit us, and my flash covered the room. The bed was there. It had been slept in, at least mussed up. But the window was wide open. Ziggie was gone. I saw the phone by the side of the bed.

"Outside phone?" I asked.

"Yes," Addison gasped. "You don't think someone telephoned her and lured her out?"

"What do you think?" I demanded harshly.

My thoughts were back on the same line again. Ruby Klegg was a killer—for three million dollars. Smiley Henderson was a killer, for a good deal less. Could the girl have been lured to her death? Addison Howe inherited the money, had me for his alibi. I turned on him sharply but never spoke the words. I swung around, grabbed an old man who had just come in. Addison explained he was the servant Malcom.

"I called after her, Mr. 'Addison,'" Malcom was saying, his voice shaking. "I called but she went off in the big car. I watched like you said, but she got away."

I guess I nearly knocked Malcom over in my hurry to get out. They followed me. The convertible was still there. I grinned, or at least set my lips grimly. I still had the ignition key in my pocket.

I saw the gun in Addison's hand as he came out the door. I didn't figure

what he thought of doing with it. I only figured what he might do with it. I was mad, good and mad. I smacked his wrist with the nose of my gun, knocking his to the ground. Then I rushed to the convertible.

"Don't leave this house, Addison Howe!" I hollered back over my shoulder. "I know—" I cut that line short and was in the car.

Out the gate and turning north toward Indio. Where else could she have gone? Who would have telephoned her? Why? Something about the missing will. Then she didn't have it. Or did she have it and did some one put the bee on her and make her believe he knew she had it, and would make a financial deal with her to produce it?

Who? Smiley Henderson? Or the nurse, Miss Burton?

Maybe the nurse had the will and was willing to sell it. Well, that would be just a question of money. But Smiley would kill to get what he wanted. I had been a fool to sit there with Addison.

So I rolled north, turned right, then left, and was on the straight-away into Indio.

I got a break. I was simply watching the road ahead for a speeding car. I wasn't looking to left or right, but there was a slight curve to the road, not one you would notice, but my headlights for an instant shot off the road. I saw it, and put the brakes on slowly.

A black object had loomed up off the road. It was the big Lincoln in which we had carried Ruby Klegg's body.

I didn't know if she had run off the road there by accident or with a flat, but I hoped she had. Mostly, I thought this was the rendezvous.

I didn't like the sand at the side of the road. I didn't want to get stuck. I drove a bit farther, saw a side road, at least a place where a car could turn. I swung into it, clicked off the lights, pulled on the brake and hopped out of the car.

Cold and silent, and then it wasn't silent any more. From somewhere, far distant, came the cry of coyotes. Then not too far distant, more cries.

I went straight back toward the big black limousine. Not in the center of the road but stumbling along in the soft

sand at the side. I could see a little better now in the endless vastness. To the east through a grove of date palms I thought I caught a glimpse of a rising moon.

Was the girl still in the car? Had she run off the road on purpose? Was that the date garden to my right, the one in which we buried Ruby Klegg? Had anyone telephoned her, after all? Had she come out of her own accord, come out to—I gulped—dig up the body of Ruby Klegg?

But why? To get the will, perhaps. The will Ruby might have carried in his pocket. But she knew he didn't have it. She had heard as I heard Ruby Klegg's demand for that will when he threatened her with the knife.

No, Ruby didn't have any will in his pocket because—

I stopped dead on the road, listening and thinking. Listening for the sound of a shovel in soft dirt maybe. And thinking that Ruby Klegg might have had the will in his pocket but hadn't known it. He couldn't have known it because the will was put in his pocket after he was dead. Put there because the one who had it was afraid I would get it. I hadn't searched Ziggy, but she couldn't be sure I wouldn't. And she couldn't—wouldn't—have that will found on her. So in fear and panic she had—

I STOPPED that line of thought. Fear was hardly a part of Ziggy's make-up, and panic with her was out of the question. No, if she had put that will in Ruby's pocket she had done it deliberately and carefully.

Yet how easy it would have been to do it. Open the car door and let the body roll out on the road. Hoping perhaps that she would reach that body before anyone else would, maybe even planning in that shrewd, clever mind of hers the burying of the dead man and later, like this now, digging up the body.

Or maybe she had kept that will on her. Maybe she had waited to be sure I wouldn't search Ruby, and had slipped that will in his pocket just before I buried him.

I didn't find the car right away. I couldn't see it. Then I heard it. At

least I heard some car. A low, purring rhythm as if the engine idled. I pulled out my gun, crouched low, and moved toward that sound, finally pushing my way through a clump of tamarac trees and almost bumping into the big car.

Edging along the side I reached the driver's seat. Was the girl behind the wheel, getting ready to back out? No shadowy figure was there. My gun half-raised, I chanced a single ribbon of light from my flash. The front of the car was empty.

I walked carefully around the car in the dark. I tripped, caught at the rear tire. It was flat. I flashed on my light—a second was enough. The next moment I held the flash lit, swung back to the car, tore open the rear door.

What I had seen on the back of that car was a hose attached to the exhaust, and that hose was wound up and through the rear window of the car which was a little open at the top. Even as I swung open that door I saw the newspaper that had been shoved in the top of the window, hard around the hose, keeping out the cold desert air.

Ziggy was there. She lay on the floor. There was a bruise across her forehead. She was gagged, and bound. Instantly, I had her out of that car and lying on the hard powdered earth. She didn't move. I tore the gag from her mouth. I knew she was alive—not conscious, but alive. And conscious or unconscious Ziggy fought to live. She had gone through too much in life to die now, I guess. She drew in air, drew at it until she choked on it.

There were thick pads about her wrists under the rope that bound them, and the same about her ankles. A nice little attention on the murderer's part, I thought. No scars to mar her beautiful young body, except the single bruise on her forehead.

Ziggy spoke.

"Race—Race Williams." I hadn't spoken, and I don't think the flash had shone upon my face. "I prayed—" A funny little laugh then. "Yes, I prayed you'd come. I knew you'd come. You're different, you know. Other people don't give a care about Ziggy."

"Tell me," I said, "exactly how it happened."

"A woman telephoned, said she was the nurse, Burton. She wanted to talk to me about the will." Ziggie hesitated, drew in her breath, then said, "She said she had information. She hinted would I buy it, and I hinted I might."

"She told you to come here?"

"Yes," she said. "I'm a bit dazed. The bump, you know. He hit me on the head, said he would tie me up so he wouldn't leave any marks on my wrists or ankles. Then he would come back and remove the ropes when I was dead. He said the bump on my head would look as if it hit the wheel when I went off the road. Yes, he would remove the hose and close the window. I went off the road. Things are clearer now."

Something jabbed hard against my back as I knelt upon the ground:

"The little lady has had a rough time, Mr. Race Williams," a cold voice said. "Let me tell you about it. Stand up. Drop the gun!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### DEAD SHOT WILLIAMS



**Q**UITE well I know my way around. I knew what I faced. I knew I would be dead in a second. No one would be fool enough to let me live longer with a gun in my hand. So I dropped the gun, half-tossed it a dozen feet from me, to

my right.

I was trapped. Trapped like any novice. For I knew that voice. And I knew, too, that I had to die and that the girl had to die. The jig was up for the man with the gun if either one of us lived.

Fool! Sure, I was a fool. The carefully bound hands and feet all should have told me the man would be back, that he wouldn't go far away.

All this went through my mind in an instant, and in that instant that I started to stand up and take lead in the back. Stand up and die. Die without even raising a finger to save myself and the girl. Okay, maybe I would die. Maybe I wouldn't. This man with the gun knew the law of the gun, the law of the night. He knew that when a gun is stuck into your back you obey that gun.

I was only half up when I dived. I dived to the right, my hand reaching for my gun, my body twisting in the air even as I grabbed it. He fired once and missed me, because my body was twisting. He fired again and missed me, because he wasn't satisfied in pounding lead into my body. He knew his business and knew that a bullet in my body might not kill me, and that if I turned and fired I wouldn't miss.

He was shooting for my head and shooting to kill when I turned over and raised my gun. He had the drop on me. There was death before I could squeeze lead. I saw it in his face, saw it in his eyes, in the bright gleam there—the deadly eyes of a killer just before he kills.

We didn't fire together, for I was bringing my hand up and twisting my head when he shot. There was something cold and hard across my throat like a piece of ice, then it was warm, and he didn't fire again.

I closed my finger once. That was all. I saw the tiny hole in the center of his forehead, saw it turn from purple to red and widen slightly. Then he dropped to his knees and fell forward on his face.

I was coming to my feet before I realized the truth. How in that dead blackness I had seen his face, his eyes, the tiny ever-widening hole in his forehead. It was because there was a light on his face and now I saw it plainly. The moon smack through the palms, the moon that my moving body had manipulated into the bit of gun play. Or maybe I was wrong, and it was simply the moon's own idea.

The girl was on her knees, clutching at my arm now, trying to come to her feet despite the ankles which were still bound. I pulled out my knife, cut her loose. She staggered erect, hung on to me.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

"They don't come any deader," I told her.

I picked up my light, flashed it down on Henderson, cut it off almost at once, not wanting her to see. So it was a shock at first when she said:

"Do we bury him too?"

Then I remembered her past and her

present also, as I thought of Ruby Klegg. But I felt of my throat, found that the side of it was wet and slippery. I shook my head at her.

"No, Ziggie," I said. "This corpse is on me. They know he's in Indio. They know I'm in Indio. Someone may have heard the shot."

"No one would hear it out here, or pay any attention to it if they did."

"It doesn't matter, Ziggie."

I pulled my fingers from my throat. They showed red in the moonlight. But then I could hardly expect a guy like Smiley to miss entirely.

"His lawyer will look for him," I said. "His detective will look for him. The police will look for me, but I have a scratch to show self-defense."

I took her arm then, for I had a shock coming for her. But she had snatched the flash from my hand and was looking at my neck, daubing at the wound with a handkerchief.

"It isn't anything," I told her. "I was hired to protect you."

"And you did." Her voice was low. Then she said, "Why do you think this man Henderson wanted to kill me?"

"You don't know?" I asked.

"You do?"

"I think I do, Ziggie. Who gets the money if you die? Who? Do you know?"

"Not him." There was a forced sort of laugh in her voice.

"No," I said. "But the man who hired him to kill you would get the money. Don't you know who inherits, if you die?"

"Why, Addison, of course. What could this man . . . Why, you think—but you don't even think it!"

"Yes," I said. "Addison Howe gets the money if you die."

I WASN'T prepared for the way she would take it. I didn't expect her to faint. But I thought it would crack up the almost easy indifference with which she faced death herself and saw others die. And as I said, I wasn't prepared for the way she did take it.

She laughed. Then she hoisted the flash up into my face. And suddenly she was gone. Just like that she had disappeared in the night.

I started after her. I thought of

my car, started that way, and stopped. She couldn't know where the car was. But she could return to the body of Smiley Henderson and remove anything he might have in his clothing. A ghastly job even for a man. I didn't like it myself. Still that didn't mean that Ziggie couldn't do it.

Suppose there was another will, and this one left Addison Howe out of it and Ziggie had it? Suppose Smiley Henderson had got it from her? I know I didn't make sense, but I certainly was going to take a look for that will.

I went through Smiley's pockets. Not a thing. No will. No letters. No document of any kind. Well, I'd get the car, go back to the house, give Ziggie the protection she still needed. I would telephone the police about this corpse. My end of it seemed legal enough, perhaps even noble if you have an open mind.

I stood up. A motor roared, a car ground into gear and I let out with all speed toward the road. The moon helped again. I saw the road plainly.

I made it, too, and was running toward Indio when Ziggie backed out the convertible and turned toward the Howe ranch. It was a simple matter to swing open the door and jump in beside her.

"Ziggie," I said, "you had an extra key to the ignition."

"I have an extra key to all the cars," she said, as we moved along slowly. "I forget so often. I'm sorry I left you like that. But you see I love Addison. I love him beyond life, beyond death—my death or another's. I would kill anyone who would harm him."

"Well," I said, "that may be very true, but it doesn't alter the picture. Take it easy now. Stop the car."

"Why?"

"The big Lincoln, for instance. The shovel we used. It wouldn't still be in the car, would it?"

"But yes," she said. "Will I go and get it?"

"It is a heavy shovel." I smiled. "We'll carry it together."

When we returned to the car, I said: "Ziggie, I want you to drive me to where we buried Ruby Klegg."

"Who?" And suddenly, "Oh, was that the name?"

"I simply want to be sure it's a good

job," I lied easily. "The police may start looking around when I tell them about one body. I just want a look."

"Okay."

She nodded and she put a nice bit of accent on the okay.

SHE showed no suspicion, no interest any more than a shrug of her shoulders as if she thought I was the nervous type. But she sure knew her way about that desert.

I'd have spent hours, maybe days finding the place in the daytime but she drove me right to the spot in and out among the date palms again.

I made sure it was the right spot. I took both ignition keys, got the shovel out of the car, and started to dig.

"Now, Ziggy," I said, "I want to talk to you like a Dutch uncle while I do this little job."

That was that. I can't say I expected it. I can't say I didn't. But she was out of the car and was gone. I let out one holler after her.

"As you value your life, Ziggy, don't go back to Addison Howe!"

Alone in the ever-brightening desert moonlight I dug. Before, I had been worried I hadn't buried Ruby deep enough; now I was worried that I had buried him too deep.

But the soil was easy going, and pretty soon, if you'll excuse that expression, I struck pay dirt.

I won't go into the gruesome details. I didn't like the job any more than you would have; maybe not so much.

I found an envelope. A long manila envelope. It was sealed. It was bound around with twine. I opened it. It wasn't the will.

It was something else, something that made me whistle as, crouched down there in that open grave, I read it beneath my small flash.

I made a neat job of putting the dirt back, patted it down, and went toward the car. I felt pretty good. I felt pretty cocky, though why I felt that way I didn't know. In the car I read the document again.

It was short and to the point and written by hand in ink. It read simply:

So that no one else will ever be blamed for it, I herewith state that on the night of March

11, 1945, I, Addison Howe, shot and killed Morris Snead.

Addison Howe

HOW had Ruby Klegg come to have that confession, or rather more simply that statement by Addison Howe, that he had killed a man?

I put the envelope into my pocket. It gave me a comfortable feeling that Addison Howe had killed a man, and that I had something that would make him talk.

Then it gave me an uncomfortable feeling that since Addison Howe had killed before he would kill again—if not a man, a woman.

Had I figured things out? Were they more confused? The answer was yes to both questions. I knew how Ruby Klegg was mixed up with Addison Howe. Somewhere between them was the killing of a man named Morris Snead, and Ruby Klegg had wanted to be sure he never would be blamed for it.

I thought, too, I knew why Ruby was willing to kill Ziggy for Addison. That little document was worth a lot of money to Ruby Klegg if Addison was rich. It wasn't worth a hoot if Addison didn't get hold of his brother's money.

I stepped on the gas, tried to follow in the ruts as Ziggy had, but took a beating over the mounds most of the time. Then I saw the lights of the bungalow.

I wanted to get back to that house before Addison took a powder.

The door was not locked, and I walked in. The man and the girl broke. I don't know what kind of a clinch it was. But the girl was breathing heavily, which might have been from running back to the bungalow, or from Addison grabbing her by the throat. Or—or—well, from Addison not grabbing her by the throat.

ADDISON HOWE turned and looked at me. There was a misty something deep in those blue eyes. He smiled when I said:

"Mr. Howe, I'll have to talk to you alone, after I call the police."

His face never changed when I went to the phone, but Ziggy's did. There was nothing phony about her unless it was "spots before my eyes." Her emo-

tions showed too plainly. She reached the phone before me, jammed the instrument aside.

"You're not going to tell the police that silly thing you told me about Addison!"

"We'll see," I fenced, as I lifted the French phone.

"Leave us alone, Ziggy," Addison Howe said, and to my surprise she left the room without a word.

I dropped the phone.

"The police will pick up the body of Smiley Henderson," I said to Addison Howe, "then come here to talk to me, Mrs. Howe, and you."

HOWE walked over and leisurely put a log on the fire, motioned me to a chair, and lit his pipe.

"I take it, Mr. Williams, I am in for a few unpleasant moments. Is it true that Ruby Klegg is dead?" And when I just stared at him, he added, "Ziggy lost her head and then told me everything."

I took a grin.

"I believe she told you everything," I said. "But losing her head, I doubt that."

"I doubt that too. I hate to stoop to subterfuge, selfish subterfuge." He looked at me keenly. "Your attitude toward me tonight before we found Ziggy missing was decidedly suspicious, but uncertain. Now I feel that you are no longer uncertain, have entire command of the situation and peculiarly, too, I do not feel that you are suspicious."

"I am certain that you killed a man called Morris Snead. The police would like to know that."

"Like to know? Then you wish something from me. Am I to understand that for that something you'll pay with silence?"

"I'm not a policeman," I told him. "I'm not hired to look for the slayer of Morris Snead. If the killing was justified, my ethics do not even make it necessary for me to mention it. Tell me about it."

"Ruby Klegg and Smiley Henderson are both dead?"

"Yes."

"May I see the document?"

## FINISHED BUSINESS



WITHOUT another word I took the manila envelope from my pocket and handed it over to Howe. He gazed toward the fire, looked at me, smiled, read the document, then handed it back to me.

"You are not a foolish man or a trusting man, Mr. Williams," he said. "But a man very sure of himself. Now what do you want?"

"First, about this killing of Snead. In detail as to time and place."

"Simple, Mr. Williams. The date you have there—the time about one o'clock in the morning. The place, the Terrace Hotel Apartments, New York City. I kept a suite there for years."

"Klegg's hotel?"

"Yes. I was being blackmailed by Morris Snead. He was a clerk there. I bought some letters back one at a time, until the important one. Then he just showed it to me, took the money and laughed in my face—and kept the letter. One night—I guess it was his laugh, for there must have been some reason. I had a gun and I shot him dead. I took the letter and burned it, just before Ruby Klegg and this Smiley man walked in."

"And then?"

"I had been a guest of the hotel a great many years. Ruby and his friend Henderson removed the body. I believe, from the evening papers, it was found later in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Owning the hotel, it was not too difficult for Klegg. In case of trouble for Mr. Klegg or my untimely death, I signed that little paper for him."

"And he in return blackmailed you."

"To the tune of something over one hundred thousand dollars."

"You had that much money?"

"No. My brother helped me out. He knew nothing of the blackmailing." He paused, then said, "So Klegg carried the document with him once too often."

"He always brought it with him when he demanded money from you?"

"Yes, he was quite a psychologist, Mr. Williams. It always made me go to my



brother, until my brother would give no longer, and I had nothing more to give."

"So that is why your brother called his lawyers to draw a new will leaving you out of it. Did he know about the blackmail?"

"He thought me a fool, or maybe guessed at the blackmail. I don't know. He quite evidently thought better of it later, and drew the new will."

"Then there is another will." I came to my feet, tapped the folded confession of the killing of Snead. "The police will be here soon," I said. "I want that will—now."

"What makes you think I have the will?"

"I don't think you have, but I think you can get it from Ziggie. I have figured things out pretty fair, Mr. Howe. There wasn't any cousin. That was simply an invention to put Smiley on the scene, to show honesty of purpose. He and Klegg intended to kill Ziggie so you would inherit the money, then they could get it from you with this confession of your killing Morris Snead."

"Oh"—he stretched out his legs—"there is a cousin. But my brother had never even met her. Henderson did locate her, did give her to believe she might get some money, and did have her sign over a share if he got it for her."

"And"—I was thinking—"you and Ziggie pretended not to like each other. That's why you couldn't marry her—because they'd make you chisel the money out of her for them, or kill her anyway." I stopped and then said, puzzled, "But suppose this new will was found and Ziggie was dead, and it went to the college. The college seemed pretty sure about the money."

"The college." He shook his head. "That was another red herring that Klegg and Henderson drew across the path. They had some one anonymously telephone the dean of that college—a grasping, greedy man—and inform him that the will of Bertram Howe left everything to the college. That the nurse could tell things." He shrugged. "It put an honest and interested institution into the search for the will." He smiled now. "It was rather fun, wasn't it? They were shrewd, clever men. I watched their plot develop with considerable in-

terest, until I feared for Ziggie's life. But as you once said, Mr. Williams, you were retained simply to recover the missing will. I—I'll give you the will for that document."

"And bankrupt yourself and Ziggie?"

"I didn't say that." His blue eyes sparkled. "I have some paintings hidden away, and my touch is as sure as ever. But I wouldn't paint just so these blackmailers could have the money from my work. Yes, I'll give you the will in a minute—for that paper."

I GRINNED at such assurance of promptness.

"Make it thirty seconds and the confession is yours," I said facetiously as I held out the confession to him.

He put his right hand suddenly into the pocket of his dressing gown. When he pulled it out again it held a long white envelope.

"My brother's missing will," he said, and laid it in my hand.

Sure I was stunned. So would you be. I opened the envelope and drew out the will, saw the date, the signature, the names of the three witnesses. He was tossing his confession of killing Morris Snead into the fire when I started to read the will.

I looked up, said suddenly:

"I don't believe you ever killed that man Morris Snead."

"And he didn't." Ziggie came from behind the same curtains by the piano. "It was I who was being blackmailed. Addison didn't know then. I asked Addison to let me use his rooms at the Terrace Hotel. I met this Morris Snead there, gave him ten thousand dollars in cash. He refused me the letter. I saw spots before—"

She stopped and actually broke into a slight ripple of laughter.

"Well, I shot him dead anyway and took the letter. After that it is as Addison says. Klegg and Henderson came, but Addison hid me in the bathroom and they thought he shot Snead. So Addison gave up all the money he had. Gave up all he could borrow from his brother."

"For you?" I cut in.

"No." She shook her head. "For his brother. So his brother would never know. But I didn't know he was paying

out money. Addison simply told me that friends helped him hide the body."

"Why didn't you tell her about the money you were paying out?" I asked Addison.

But it was Ziggy who answered.

"Addison was afraid I would tell his brother the truth," she said. "And I did tell him the truth. I told him—yes, I told him I killed Snead. I told him when he rang up his lawyers to make another will cutting Addison out of it because he suspected Addison was being blackmailed for something—spending such great sums of money."

"Did you tell your husband why you killed this man? About your being blackmailed?"

"N-no." She hesitated. "I let him think the blackmail started after I killed him. I said this Snead lured me to his apartment posing as a Federal Agent, that he acted as a German officer did once, and—and—and—" She jerked her head up straight. "Yes, I told him that I saw black spots before my eyes."

I looked at the will again. With the exception of a few small bequests, one to the college, which would just about pay my fee, everything was left to Addison Howe "to take care of my widow as he sees fit, and with the hope that he may find it in his heart to watch over and cherish her as I have cherished her."

"Ziggy," I said, "did your husband think that his brother paid out this blackmail purposely, or that he gave the money to you to pay it?"

"I told him," she said, "that Addison gave all the money, both his own and what his brother gave him, to me to pay it. That Addison knew nothing of the killing. And I led Bertram to believe that the last cent had been paid. That was when he ordered his lawyers to tear up that unsigned will. Then he drew a new one himself."

"I see," I said.

I thought I did see. Bertram Howe didn't want to trust Ziggy with his vast fortune, and he thought his brother would see that she kept free of future trouble, so she would not have the money to squander.

"Where did you get this will?" I asked Addison.

Addison smiled.

"My brother sent it to me the day he died. I guess he felt the attack coming on. He simply put it in an envelope, addressed it and gave it to Malcom to mail. He let Malcom think it was a letter, but swore Malcom to silence about it." He paused, watched Ziggy as I gave her the will and let her read it. Then he said, "Bertram sent me a letter with the will, elaborating upon the peculiar wording of the will, about watching over and cherishing Ziggy."

"He meant for us to get—" Ziggy started and stopped.

ADDISON went on speaking.

"You see, of course, Mr. Williams, the incredible, yet slightly humorous position I was in. Both Klegg and Henderson knew what was in the will. The nurse, Miss Burton, had told Henderson—no doubt for a handsome price. But neither Henderson nor Klegg nor the nurse knew that I had the will. They were sure Ziggy had it, and later must have determined that Ziggy had destroyed it."

"What was I to do? If I produced the will they would take everything away from me, and so from Ziggy too. I hadn't thought of them killing Ziggy, because I was the only one who would have a motive, and I would hardly give them any money to keep quiet about my killing one man who was a blackguard and a thief while being tried for killing a young and charming widow."

"But last night when they were all here but Klegg, when Henderson seemed to be building up such an elaborate alibi for me, I was afraid. A short while ago Ziggy told me that Klegg was dead, had died while brutally attempting to murder her, and that Henderson, much the shrewder of the two, had made an elaborate attempt to kill her and make it appear suicide. You see the predicament I was in before that. Yet I dared not produce that will."

"Without paying Henderson and Klegg everything or going to jail for murder?" I said.

"No. No." He was very thoughtful. "There was no danger of my going to jail for murder. I knew Ziggy too well for that. If the showdown came she

would tell the truth just as she told you the truth now. That was my real predicament."

"And," I said, "what was the black-mail in the beginning? What did Snead have on Ziggie?"

Addison Howe sat up rather straight.

"Really, Mr. Williams, I don't know. Ziggie didn't tell me and quite frankly, I never thought to ask her."

It jarred me all right. Not the words in themselves, but the fact that I believed him.

"Okay, Mr. Howe," I said simply. "Give me the key to the main house."

"What for?" He was surprised.

"Why, the police will be here. I'll want to earn my fee from the college, give the police the missing will I found hidden away in Bertram Howe's library, if he has a library. Surely you don't expect to confuse the police with such a complicated story as yours, especially since you have gone to such lengths to conceal it."

Addison Howe remained seated before the fire, and it was Ziggie who got the key and took me up to the main house. It was early morning now, but the moon was a crescent shaped bit of brilliance.

"The letter Bertram wrote Addison," she said. "I guess it was that he would like Addison to marry me." She paused and when I said nothing, she murmured, "I would like that too."

"So would Addison." I gave her encouragement.

"Yes," she said. "I love him so much. I tried to tell him when I used to go to New York and pose for him in his studio at the Terrace Hotel. I couldn't tell him.

I tried to hint at it in letters I wrote. I wanted him to know. I thought maybe if he loved me, we should tell Bertram."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Oh, unfinished business is so unsatisfactory. Maybe I want advice from you. Maybe I want you to say 'Go ahead, Ziggie, find happiness at last.' I admired Bertram. I was devoted to him. But I didn't know what love was until—well, Addison."

"Yes?" I waited.

"I was living a lie with Bertram. Addison seemed so dense when I hinted around things, so I wrote Addison a letter, a long letter. I said so clearly in it 'I love you—I love you. Tell me what to do. Shall I tell Bertram?'"

"So!" I whistled. "That was the letter then, that you killed Snead to get. What did Addison think of it?"

"He never saw it," she told me. "Morrison Snead was the night clerk. He saw more in my eyes when I visited Addison than Addison or Bertram ever saw there. He stole the letter from the mail. He told me about it and I paid what I could, and then I killed him."

There was a long pause.

"So there it is," she said. "Am I worthy? Should I—can I marry Addison?"

"No spots before your eyes?" I grinned.

"No." There was no laughter in her voice.

"Sure, kid," I said. "Marry him, make him happy."

She threw her arms around me then and kissed me. At that I thought maybe I had given Addison more of a break than I gave Ziggie.

## Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep. When disorder of kidney function permits

poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills, (Adv.)

The chemist's smothered cry mingled with his partner's oath of triumph



# POOR ECONOMY

By RAY CUMMINGS

*The killer hoped that his crime would put him next to the big money, but when he began pinching pennies the guilty finger pointed at him!*

**A**LONE in the little ground floor office, Jonathan Peck sat figuring what he hoped would be next month's profits. The outlook wasn't too pleasing. Operating expenses were too high. His mind roamed on little ways to cut down. It was a hot, oppressive summer evening.

Peck was a big, squarely solid man

of forty odd. He always prided himself that he was the solid, businessman type. Watch the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves, always had been his slogan. Clad now in white linen trousers, and a white shirt open at his thick throat, he sat frowning, scrawling figures on the pad before him.

In the heavy night silence, Peck heard

the nine o'clock bell sound in his small factory across the courtyard from the office building. He glanced out his window. It was drizzling. The small paved courtyard with its single light was dim with fog through which the pavement and the factory wall glistened eerily.

Then Peck saw the four girls and little Johnny Blair of the night shift come out in a group. As he watched, they passed through the stone arcade of the entranceway and were gone. Quitting the instant the bell rang!

There certainly wasn't ever any delay among the employees of Peck & Lansing when it came to going home! A little bunch of clock-watchers! Why wouldn't they be, with a fellow like George Lansing in charge of them!

Impatiently Jonathan Peck dropped the leadpencil and shoved his scratch pad aside. He didn't bother with his coat and hat, just to cross the courtyard; the warm summer rain wasn't much more than a drizzle.

"That you, Jonathan?"

"Yes," Peck said.

His partner, George Lansing, was in the little experimental darkroom which he had rigged up, here in a recess-corner of the big cutting and packing room.

"I'm just trying out my new metal developing formula," Lansing said. "Looks pretty good, so far. Be with you in a minute."

Peck didn't answer. In the deep ruby light of the big room he stood looking around with distaste. It was a windowless room, heavy and fetid, and redolent with the smell of chemicals. Peck and Lansing were small manufacturers of photographic paper. The *Lumina Brand*.

Lansing was the chemical technician. It was his original formula for the wide latitude emulsion which had made their success possible. You didn't have to use several grades of hard and soft paper to print from negatives of different densities.

The *Lumina Brand*, with its wide latitude, gave you a good print from almost any negative. Peck had seen the value of it at once, when Lansing brought it to him two years ago. But it was Peck's money and business acumen that were putting it over.

THROUGH the partly opened door of the darkroom, Lansing spoke. "Believe it's really going to be good, Jonathan," he said.

"Is it?" Peck replied.

His eyes grew more accustomed to the room's deep ruby light now. The confounded night-shift girls and Johnny Blair, the cutter, hadn't cleaned up a thing, just quit where they were at the bell and gone home.

A stack of sensitized paper lay on the big cutting board and there were little stacks of it on the packing tables. Not that such things were of great importance, but it was annoying to be imposed upon. It exasperated Peck.

Then Lansing came out of the darkroom. He was a slim, delicate fellow, in his mid-thirties now, with a thin face and an unruly shock of dark hair. He stood wiping his hands on his apron, smiling at Peck.

"We'll give this new developing formula to our customers," he was saying. "Lightens the deep shadows, Jonathan, and still gives details in the highlights. Makes *Lumina* prints even better—a swell advertising angle." At Peck's expression he checked himself, and his grin faded. "Say, what's the matter with you? You look like a thundercloud."

Peck's ready anger rose. He and Lansing never had gotten along too well. Things had been worse, these last weeks. Might as well have a showdown now!

Peck sat on a stool by the cutting board. "Sit down," he said. "I've got a few things I want to say to you, George."

Lansing's eyebrows went up quizzically, and he grinned. "Got yourself all worked up again over something, that it?"

"Look here," Peck said. "I'm tired of you acting like a clown when I try to talk to you. You're my partner. My money is invested here with you—"

"Oh. So you really want to talk seriously?" Lansing's grin faded. He sat down in a little chair at the darkroom entrance. "Okay. Go ahead. What's your complaint now?"

"I don't like your methods," Peck said bluntly. "I never have, and I like them still less now."

"Sure. We know that. You've always—"

"And you've ignored me. I've remonstrated, but I've let it pass. But after all, I'm the senior partner—" The more Peck voiced it, the more it angered him. For two years he had put up with this shifty, impractical fellow.

"Sure you are. So what?"

"The trouble you're stirring up with our employees, just for one thing," Peck said.

Lansing's eyes narrowed. "Is that what you call it?"

So the little whippersnapper dared to be antagonistic! This was something new!

"Okay, let's have it out," Lansing was saying. "This business is being run on a silly pinchpenny system—"

"I'm running it," Peck rasped. "And that's my affair—"

"And mine too," Lansing retorted. "That's what you seem to forget, Jonathan. This room, for instance, needs a proper ventilating system—"

"That's your stinking little darkroom here," Peck cut in. "I've told you—"

"The room never gets any air. People breathe you know. Their breath gives off carbon dioxide, and needs oxygen."

"So we should spend a thousand dollars for ventilators, is that it?" Peck demanded sarcastically. "And if I don't agree to that, you stir up trouble with our employees."

"When they come to me with reasonable demands—"

Both men were thoroughly angry now. Peck sat on the stool, breathing hard, glaring. "Reasonable demands!" Peck echoed. "All you do is let them take advantage of you. Look at the condition of this room—nothing but a bunch of clock-watchers, that's what you've made them into! The bell rings and they drop everything and go home."

Lansing had climbed to his feet. His voice was still calm, but his thin face was grim and his eyes were flashing. "All this stuff is trivial talk," he said, "but then again it isn't. I told the girls to go home—I'd put the stuff away, because it's only a five or ten minute job."

"And then tomorrow they take advantage of you in some other way," Peck said.

"Sure. That's your way of looking at it." Lansing turned toward his darkroom, but then he came back. "This isn't a trivial argument because it represents a fundamental difference between us. Everything you do, all day long, is on the pinchpenny basis. Our salesmanship—our advertising—"

That made the hot-tempered Peck leap to his feet. "You miserable little squirt, are you trying to tell me how to—"

"Yes, I am! For once, I am!" Lansing snapped. "I'm ashamed to be in business with you."

"Why, you—"

"And what's more, we're going to put in a ventilating system here!"

"The deuce we are!" The dim red room was whirling before the angry Peck. It seemed suddenly that Lansing's taut little figure standing before him was blurring.

"We are," Lansing said. "Because I'm going to the Department of Health and tell them—"

**P**ECK felt himself engulfed in a red blur of chaos. His anger caused a surge in his head that knocked like little hammers in his temples. He heard himself gasping.

"Why, you cursed little—" And then Peck knew that his fist had shot out and cuffed Lansing in the face. "I'll show you what I think of you, you blasted—" Suddenly they were struggling!

"Jonathan, are you crazy? Put that down!" Lansing's voice had sudden startled horror in it. Peck was hardly aware that he had seized a knife which was lying on Johnny Blair's table—seized it and was lunging forward with it. Lansing was back in the darkroom doorway now. Then they were both in the tiny darkroom.

"Jonathan! You fool! Stop it!"

Now you've got him! Let him have it, the little doublecrosser! Peck's fragments of thoughts held only a dim knowledge that he was stabbing with the knife and that Lansing was trying to ward it off. All in a second or two. In the narrow confines of the darkroom, trays and bottles were crashing. For an instant Lansing had turned, trying to seize something for a weapon, and



the flailing knife suddenly plunged into his back.

George Lansing screamed, a smothered, choked cry mingling with Peck's oath of triumph. As Peck staggered back, out through the doorway, for another moment the body of Lansing seemed balanced on wobbling legs. Then the knees buckled and it fell, lying crumpled in a little heap on the darkroom floor!

Out in the open space of the big packing room, Peck stood panting, with his blurring anger surging away like a falling flood, and a cold panic coming to take its place. He had killed Lansing! A minute ago, no such idea had been in his head. But now the thing was done!

For that horrible moment Peck stood engulfed in panic, with the sweat on him drying so that he felt wrapped in a chill, dank shroud. He had killed Lansing, and the police would find it out. But would they?

With his anger gone, Peck was able to think again. Careful now! Figure this out clearly! Through the open dark room door he could see the body lying there on its side, horrible with staring dead eyes and goggling mouth. The knife handle might have fingerprints on it! Peck wiped them off carefully.

Then Peck realized that it was Johnny Blair's knife. Good enough! He could drop a hint to the police that Blair had been on bad terms with Lansing lately. It wouldn't prove anything, just give the police something to think about.

With that gruesome thing lying there in the darkroom, Peck's whole instinct had been to dash away. Get off the premises—go home to his boarding house. Then he realized it would be the wrong thing to do.

He and Lansing were bachelors. They lived in the same boarding house, half a mile from here. Invariably it had been their habit to leave here about ninety-three together. The landlady usually saw them come home together. It would look very queer, Peck coming home to-night alone—and then tomorrow having Lansing found murdered.

Peck glanced at his watch. It was nine twenty-five. Just about the time he usually came from his office to join

Lansing here in the packing room. He'd tell the police he had just done that, and found his partner dead. An innocent man would rush to the 'phone, of course.

The telephone was on a table across the big room. As Peck went to it, he caught a glimpse of himself in a wall mirror. Nothing was wrong with his appearance, except his strained, grim face. He stared at his reflection. He looked shocked, distraught. Why not?

Peck smoothed his hair, adjusted his tie. At the telephone table he slumped into a chair. He was still breathing hard. His hand as he reached for the receiver was shaking. A cigarette would steady him.

Peck fumbled in his trousers hip pocket, drew out cigarettes and a folder of matches. He was about to light the match, but then he mumbled an exasperated curse and didn't light it. Those cursed, clock-watching girls! They had left sensitized paper lying around here. The flare of the match could easily ruin a lot of it!

Then Jonathan Peck lifted the receiver, called the Police Station, and babbled out the shocking news that he had just found his partner lying dead.

**F**ORTUNATELY the Police Station, here in this small town, was only a few blocks away. Peck sat in his chair by the 'phone, waiting, planning. This thing would come out all right.

Lansing's share of the business would be inherited by Lansing's maiden Aunt Emily. She was about sixty. Peck knew her—a futile little woman who knew nothing at all about business. She wouldn't interfere. He could run things as he liked now. He'd get a man to take Lansing's place. And that would be cheaper, too, than the money Lansing had been drawing as salary.

The sound of the police outside brought Peck out of his roaming thoughts. He went to the door to meet them. The door here was built to be a light-trap. There was an inner door, a vestibule with a deep ruby light, and then the outer door to the little courtyard. It was Sergeant McCaffery and three of his uniformed men who came in. Peck met them in the vestibule.

"Oh, hello. Sergeant—this terrible

thing—he's lying in there in the darkroom—"

One of the policemen was carrying a flashlight. As he entered the vestibule he snapped it on.

"Put that out!" Peck warned sharply. "There's photographic paper inside! You'll ruin it!"

They tramped into the packing room. "Careful," Peck warned. "No lights. I'll gather up the paper."

"Who cares?" one of the policemen growled to himself.

"Is that the darkroom over there?" the Sergeant said. "Come on, we'll start in there. Get your stuff fixed out here, Peck."

"Yes, yes I will. Only take a minute," Peck agreed. Those wretched girls, embarrassing him like this! "Close the door of the darkroom when you go in," he added. "Then you can use your flashes in there."

The sergeant and one of his men went into the darkroom. Its door closed on them. Silently the other two men watched Peck as he hurried around the room, gathering up the paper, putting it into a light-proof storage box which stood against the wall.

"Don't forget any," one of the policemen said. "That would sure be bad!"

An angry retort sprang to Peck's lips, but he suppressed it. In the silence the voices of the two men in the darkroom were audible through its flimsy cardboard walls.

"He sure tried to put up a fight—"

"Sure did, Sarge."

"He was printing some pictures. Wet prints—here are a couple on the floor, Pictures of a forest fire, look like."

"Here's the tray they were soaking in—"

"Let it stay down there, Dugan. Don't touch it!"

Suddenly Peck called out: "Okay, you can have light out here now if you want it. Everything's put away."

The darkroom door opened and Sergeant McCaffery came out with his lighted flashlight. "Haven't you got any white bulbs in this place?" he demanded. "Can't work very well just with a flashlight. We want to—"

Abruptly the sergeant checked himself, stood transfixed. His white flashlight beam was dazzling as it struck Peck who stood bathed in it.

"Well I'll be doggoned!" McCaffery gasped. "Take a look, Dugan! There's sure no mystery here!"

No mystery! What did that mean? "W-what's the matter, Sergeant?" Peck heard himself mumbling.

The Sergeant's laugh was grim and ugly. "Lansing was printing some pictures of a forest fire in there," he said. "Had 'em in a tray, with a chemical that was tinting 'em red. An' in the fight the tray got knocked to the floor! The red dye sprayed out—"

What was this? Peck stood mute with horror.

"You can't see a red stain in a deep red light," McCaffery was saying. "The light makes everything the same! Take a look at yourself, Peck! We've got you, no argument on that!"

Numbly Peck stared down at the myriad little dots and splotches of the red dye that was so plain now on his white shirt and white linen trousers! They had been hidden by the red light, when even a match-flare would have disclosed them!

If only he had lighted that cigarette and hang the expense!



COMING NEXT ISSUE

## MERRY MONTH OF MAYHEM

*An Exciting Complete Crime Novelet*

By C. S. MONTANYE

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES



Baldy tried his can-opener on the safe

# TOO MUCH HARDWARE

By RALPH OPPENHEIM

*Ben Turner was ambitious to make like a detective, but found out that he was just a darned good hardware man!*

**B**EN TURNER crossed Main Street as fast as his lanky legs would carry him. Kate, he knew, would be angry. She never liked to be left alone to attend the hardware store she had married when she married Ben. She claimed a woman never could feel at home among all those nails and tools and things.

Ben had been out to fix a stubborn lock for Mrs. George over on Spruce Street. He liked to do a thorough job, so it had

taken him hours. It was well into the afternoon now as he headed for "Elmsford's Leading Hardware Store"—a statement all the more true because it was Elmsford's only hardware store. Elmsford couldn't support two hardware stores.

A wiry, loose-jointed man in a grease-stained worksuit, Ben Turner literally jangled as he walked. He was always loaded with hardware. Bunches of keys, which he had made for all kinds of locks,

tinkled in his pockets. Nailheads protruded from his suit, and tools weighed him down. The only quiet objects he carried were two detective magazines he had bought on the way.

Ben Turner was an avid reader of detective stories. Although he was first and foremost a hardware man, he often felt he would have made an equally good detective.

The sleepy little town of Elmsford had known little crime, but many a time Ben Turner had made suggestions as to how to trap criminals to Chief of Police Barton. The fact that Chief Barton failed to heed such suggestions, and instead ran police matters his own way, didn't discourage Turner in the least. He felt that if ever any real crime broke, the Chief would appreciate his natural-born detective talents.

He walked past the window of his store, glancing with pride at the neat display of newly-released hardware—shining electric fans, garden tools, aluminum kitchenware—all the things that had been missing during the tight war years.

As he neared the entrance of the store, a customer came striding out, carrying a package whose size showed he had really bought something. Ben Turner recognized the big, stocky man as a Mr. Burke, a stranger in Elmsford. He'd rented a bungalow up on Green Hill a few weeks ago; he was a retired salesman. Ben Turner knew all this because he knew everything that went on in Elmsford. A hardware man who is also a repair man gets around and hears all the gossip.

There were townfolk who always looked suspiciously at strangers. Turner wasn't that type, he told himself. Nevertheless, ever since this Mr. Burke had come into the store, a week ago, to buy a flashlight, Turner hadn't liked him. There was something unpleasant about the big man. Maybe it was his eyes—they were small in the big, heavy face, and they looked capable of meanness. Maybe it was his manner—a little on the surly, bullying side, where other customers always paused to gossip cheerfully, Burke curtly ordered his purchase and strode out.

However, a customer was a customer, and obviously Burke had returned today to make a bigger purchase. So Ben Tur-

ner gave him a friendly grin.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Burke."

Burke gave Turner a quick, cursory glance, evidently only half-recognizing the hardware man.

"Lo," he growled in his curt way, and strode on by. Turner, looking after him, saw him climb into a green sedan and drive away.

"Unfriendly sort of cuss," Ben muttered, and pushed on into his store to face Kate's angry, inquiring eyes. Kate, buxom and rosy cheeked, came from the cash register, where she had just rung up the awesome figures: \$12.98.

**B**EN TURNER saw those figures as he threaded his way past hardware-laden counters, and he got in the first word:

"What did Mr. Burke do, Kate—buy out the store?"

"He just about drove me crazy, that's what he did." Kate's voice was stormy. "Him with his list of tools he wanted, and half of them I didn't know where you had put and had to hunt high and low."

"What did he buy?" Ben Turner demanded, taking the two detective magazines from his pocket and putting them on the counter for handy reading.

"I wrote it all down, the way you asked me to," Kate said, showing him a list. Turner looked it over:

- 4 flashlight batteries.
- 6 assorted crowbars, 1 hooked.
- 1 brace.
- 6 assorted tempered-steel bits.
- 2 pr. wire-cutting pliers.
- 1 glass-cutter.

As he read the list, Turner's eyes gleamed.

"Of course, Kate, you sold him that war-emergency stuff we've had laying around idle!" he assumed. "We had all the items—even the flashlight batteries—in that, and it cost us just as much as the new-released stuff."

Kate shook her head, her voice a little subdued now.

"Listen, Ben. He knew just what he wanted—the best quality, he said. He had it all written down, the make and everything."

"You mean you sold him the new stock—?" Ben Turner couldn't believe his ears. He took the list and began to dash

about the store, taking a quick inventory. In the face of his rising anger Kate grew more and more subdued.

"Six new drill-bits! And they are still hard to get—those hard-steel bits that can cut through metal like cheese!" Turner was raging. "And the set of crowbars—the jobber said it might be months before I get more in! As for the wire-cutters—" Words failed him, at least for a full minute.

"He insisted on the best quality," Kate got in timidly.

"Why did he have to have them?" Ben demanded.

"He said he wanted to do some carpentering around the house—"

"Carpentering! And he had to have stuff like this! Kate, are you trying to ruin us? This Burke is just a stranger in town—we've got steady, big-paying customers like Andy Winters, who really needs high quality stuff for his garage business. Suppose he asks for it now! What can I tell him—that I'll have it in a few months? Why—"

He broke off as a customer he was glad wasn't Andy Winters came in. It was Mrs. Simpson. She bought a can of house paint and Ben Turner had all he could do to chat with her in his usual pleasant way. However, the interlude gave Kate a chance to recover. This time she got in the first word—as soon as Mrs. Simpson went out.

"Now you see here, Ben—you stop bullying me!" She had absently picked up a big screw-driver and was pointing it at her husband. She waved it to emphasize her righteous words. "If you don't like the way I handle your business, you shouldn't go off for hours and leave me here, a helpless woman!"

Turner groaned.

"That's right, blame me! A child should have sense enough to sell that war-emergency stuff when there's such an opportunity! Here we are, trying to scrimp and save so we can buy a house out of the town limits—what's more," he added irrelevantly, "I don't like that Mr. Burke. I don't take to him at all. Carpentering, eh? He doesn't need tools like that for plain carpentering around that bungalow of his. And how come he just bought these tools—no hammer or nails or screws, or screwdriver—"

"Maybe he has those tools already," Kate suggested.

"Well, he still wouldn't need these high-quality items." Ben's jaw suddenly thrust forward decisively. He grabbed for the battered hat he had taken from his sandy head.

"Where are you going, Ben Turner?" his wife asked sharply.

"Up over Green Hill, to see just why Burke did buy these tools. Maybe I can make a deal with him—sell him the other stuff at a discount." As he spoke, he took the list Kate had made out, and hurriedly supplied himself with a bagful of tools of war-emergency make. Except in quality, they were identical to those which Mr. Burke had purchased.

"Ben, you're only wasting time—and leaving me alone again!" Kate protested, but the door slammed behind Turner's lanky, jangling figure.

His coupe was parked down the block. Like his person, it was full of assorted hardware—autojacks, nails, bolts and assorted items which rattled around the floor as Ben drove down Main past the police station, turned onto Maple, and headed for Green Hill.

This was a section just within the town limits, on the State Highway, as yet still countrified and sparsely populated. The bungalow Mr. Burke lived in was more or less isolated, and the grounds would have looked pretty if Burke had attended to the lawns a little and trimmed up the surrounding bushes.

There was a little garage beside the bungalow. The doors were open, and Turner, stopping his own car in front of the house, saw that Burke's green sedan was within the garage. No doubt Mr. Burke was at home.

Ben Turner, the package of war-emergency tools under one arm, strode with determination to the front door. He put a lean finger on the bell-button. It rang within, rather weakly. Needed wiring, he told himself.

HEAVY steps sounded, and the door opened only a few inches. The small, unfriendly eyes of Mr. Burke peered out.

"Well?" came the surly voice.

"My name's Turner," Ben said. "I'm the proprietor of the hardware store down

on Main Street. My wife sold you some tools—"

"What about it?" Burke wanted to know.

"I—" Turner groped for the right words. "I kind of feel you bought the wrong tools, Mr. Burke—"

He was surprised at the way the small eyes narrowed, and the voice almost rasped.

"What are you trying to tell me?" The door opened. "Come on in." The invitation was anything but hospitable.

Burke stepped aside. Turner stepped in. The room he was in was a combination living and bedroom. Open doorways revealed a small bathroom and a cubicle of a kitchen.

Turner looked around. Burke was not a very neat man. Cigarette butts lay strewn on the floor, and an unwashed whisky glass stood on a table. Furthermore, the hardware man saw, the whole place needed carpentering.

Across the room, a window shade hung half-torn from its obviously springless roller. From the bathroom came a drip-drip sound which told him a faucet needed tightening. On a doorway, a piece of molding stood out loosely.

"Well, speak your piece. What do you mean I bought the wrong tools?" Burke stood over Turner, looking very big and very unfriendly. But business was business, so Turner screwed up his courage.

"You paid a lot of money for very special quality tools, Mr. Burke," he explained. "Now, for carpentering such as you want to do, I can give you the same tools of a different make, and it will cost you less."

As he spoke, Turner noted that the big man's narrowed eyes swept across the room to a table. On the table was a black traveling bag, and near it a torn paper bag Ben recognized. It became clear to Turner that Burke had unwrapped the tools and put them in the satchel.

At the same time, Burke seemed to relax a little. He even smiled, though there was no warmth in the smile.

"Look, feller, when it comes to buying things, I'm no piker," Burke said. "Always the best, that's what I say. I don't mind paying a little more for good quality. And like I told your wife, I want the best quality."

"If you're aiming to fix things around here," Turner protested, "you ought to have bought other tools anyway. A hammer, a saw, a screwdriver—"

Burke put a cigarette between thick lips, lit it nonchalantly.

"I got those things right around here—look." He led Turner to the doorway of the kitchen. In a corner were some old rusty tools that had evidently come with the house.

"I wanted the good stuff for some special remodeling I aim to do around here," Burke added.

"If you'd tell me just what you're going to do, we'd see if you really needed the higher-priced tools," Turner persisted.

Burke's short-lived patience came to an abrupt end. His eyes were unfriendly again.

"Listen, are you telling me what I want or don't want? I guess I know more about carpentering than any hick hardware guy! Now suppose you get outa my sight, and stay out, before I throw you out! Beat it!"

Turner, though wiry and spry, didn't try to make an argument of it. Burke looked as though he meant business, and he was big enough to do such business.

"All right—I just thought you'd like to save some money," said Turner.

He left with his package. The door slammed after him. As he got into his coupe he saw the surly Mr. Burke glaring out of the window with the broken shade.

"A hick hardware man, eh?"

Driving back to town, Ben Turner gave vent to his pent-up rage. But at the same time he was doing some plain thinking. An old and familiar feeling was coming on him—the feeling he had when sometimes he read a detective story and imagined how much better he could have done than the fictional detective. His brain cells were being very deductive.

So Burke claimed to be a hand at carpentering, did he? Yet the house he lived in needed a million repairs, all of which could have been done with the old tools lying in the kitchen. Would any man possessing even a grain of carpenter talent be able to live in that place without making at least a few repairs?

Then there were the tools he had bought, insisting on high quality. Ben Turner gave more and more thought to



those tools. Why had he put them in a satchel? And why had he lied about them? He certainly wasn't going to use them around the house. He had no intention of repairing the house, or he would have done so long ago.

By the time Ben Turner reached Main Street again his mind was racing with ideas. He stopped at the police station, where he found Chief Barton alone at his desk.

CHIEF BARTON, a husky, keen-eyed man, took one look at Turner and groaned.

"You again!" he said. "What kind of crime-detecting ideas have you come to hand me this time?"

Turner pulled up a chair just as if he had been invited to do so. Then he related all the events concerning Mr. Burke.

"What do you make of all that, Chief?" he demanded.

Chief Barton sighed.

"Nothing," was his succinct answer.

"Then listen to me." Turner spoke with confidence. "Here's a list of the tools Mr. Burke bought. I told you he lied about what he wants them for. I did a little thinking," he said modestly.

"Consider those items. Batteries for a flashlight. Glass-cutter. Strong crowbars, one of them hooked. Wire-cutters. Drills that will go through strong steel. Now just suppose," he waved down the Chief's objections, "suppose this Mr. Burke were a burglar of some kind. Those tools would be very useful for breaking in some place, prying open something—"

"Sure, sure," Chief Barton acknowledged. "But they would also be useful in a lot of legitimate ways. Now look here, Ben. You're a nice fellow, and I like you. But I'd like you more if you would mind your hardware business and let me mind my police business. If this Mr. Burke were a burglar of some kind, a burglar who used tools, we'd have him tabbed weeks ago, when he moved in. Burglars like that are known to the police. They're professionals. Look here."

Speaking as if humoring a wayward child, the Chief reached for a bunch of circulars.

"Here's the kind of stuff we have on wanted criminals—it comes from police and F.B.I. authorities."

Ben Turner looked over that stuff with avid interest. He felt quite thrilled handling this genuine police material. He took his time, disregarding Chief Barton's obvious and growing impatience. Most of the wanted criminals were holdup men, bank-robbers and the like. But one circular stood out from the rest.

It said:

### WANTED: FOR BURGLARY AND MURDER THE SLAGLE BROTHERS

The photographs showed two very tough-looking specimens. One had a big-jowled face and a bald pate. His name, appropriately, was "Baldy" Slagle. The other, younger, thin-faced and big-eared, was his brother Nick.

The terse, official story of the Slagle brothers rivaled any fictional story Ben Turner had ever read. These two were expert safe-crackers, not in the old Jimmy Valentine tradition, but in the modern, streamlined way.

Working sometimes with other mobsters, sometimes alone, they had broken into safes considered virtually burglar-proof. Baldy, the brains, used as his principal tool a sectional 'can-opener' of his own making, which he always carried with him, taking it apart in three pieces which he could wear on a chain around his neck, under his clothes.

The last job they had pulled had been in Chicago. They had robbed the safe of a big investment office, making away with fifty thousand dollars cash, and an equal amount in negotiable bonds. A watchman had interrupted their work and had been found with his skull bashed in, lying near the demolished safe.

All law-enforcement authorities were on the lookout for the two brothers. The money they'd stolen was hot, the serial numbers known. None of it had shown up for the past months. Nor was there any definite clue as to the whereabouts of the wanted brothers. They were believed to have been heading west, for the Coast. A good-sized reward was offered for any information leading to their arrest of capture, dead or alive.

It was all very fascinating, but on the other hand Turner had to admit even to himself that it couldn't have any bearing

on his own problem. Not even remotely did Mr. Burke resemble either Baldy or Nick Slagle. And even plastic surgery and a wig would not have changed either of those two into the surly Burke.

The only and totally unreasonable connection was that Ben Turner was thinking of some type of burglary involving tools—and even here he had nothing, for Baldy Slagle made and used his own special instrument.

He handed the circulars back to Chief Barton.

"All right, so you have nothing on Burke," he said. "Just the same I'm not satisfied. He bears watching."

The Chief laughed.

"Go ahead and watch him yourself, then!"

Ben Turner's eyes narrowed.

"Maybe I will," he said.

Late that afternoon Ben Turner indeed paid a second visit to the bungalow over Green Hill. He had stopped in his store only to tell a protesting Kate that he would be busy for awhile, that she should close up and not worry, he was working on something important.

He drove past the bungalow this time and stopped his coupe around a bend in the road. He did not think Mr. Burke would be very pleased to see him, but he didn't have to figure out an approach, for he saw that the green sedan was missing from the garage. Mr. Burke was not at home. Had he taken the precious tools with him?

Turner went to the door, tried it, found it locked. That did not bother him in the least. Out of his laden pockets came the bunch of jangling keys of all description. It did not take him long to find one to fit the worn lock.

He entered the bungalow nervously, but no one was there. And his eyes gleamed when he saw the black satchel still on the table.

HE HURRIED back to his car and took the package of war-emergency tools he had been carrying around all this time. He took them back into the house. The satchel wasn't locked. Opening it hurriedly, he took out the precious, high-quality stuff. In minutes he had made a substitution of every item, and had wrapped the high-quality tools in

his package. At least, he told himself, Mr. Burke wasn't going to have the use of that good stuff for whatever he wanted it and—

"Just what do you think you're doing?" growled a voice that did unpleasant things to Ben Turner's spine.

He turned around, holding his newly-wrapped package. Burke had come back. His sedan evidently had a quiet motor, for Ben hadn't heard it. And now Mr. Burke stood there, his face a livid scowl—and one big hand jammed into his coat pocket. In fact the hand looked far too big for comfort, bigger than Burke's other doubled fist of a hand. Ben Turner wondered what else was in that pocket.

He thought fast. He was pretty sure Burke had just come in, had not seen him substituting the tools. He spoke hurriedly:

"Mr. Burke, I came back because, in going over things, I found that my wife had overcharged you for the tools. You see, I owe you two dollars."

"Yeah? And just how did you get into the house? The door was locked."

"Oh that was easy." Turner tried to sound nonchalant. He showed his bunch of keys. "I have keys for most every house. When people are out I always let myself in. Everybody in Elmsford trusts me though, so—"

"Well I don't trust you and I don't like you!" Burke said. But it did seem he wasn't too suspicious now. He held out his free hand. "All right, hand it over."

"H-hand what over?"

"The two bucks you say you owe me."

Turner had to give it to him. Of course he'd been resigned to let the war-emergency stuff go at a discount, but still he was a little sorry he hadn't thought up a less costly story.

"And now, just to make sure you stay away from me—"

Burke's growling words were emphasized by action. He seized Ben Turner by the collar and marched him to the door. Then he booted him out of the house with such force that Turner sprawled on the ground, the wind gone from his lungs and his senses momentarily reeling.

By the time he got to his feet, slightly dizzy, he had caught a glimpse of Burke again leaving the house carrying the satchel. The big man got in his car and

the green sedan disappeared down the State Highway.

"At least he didn't get the good tools," Turner muttered, trying to cheer himself. He picked up the package that had sprawled with him.

Anger and humiliation made him all the more determined. He wasn't through yet, not by a long shot! He was more certain than ever that Burke was involved in something criminal. If only he had some clue, some bit of evidence!

Recklessness seized him. Again he entered the bungalow—via the same key. He began to reconnoiter the ill-kept place. Suppose Burke were some kind of burglar—some specialist just like the Slagle brothers were specialists? Well, a burglar would have to 'case' any place he meant to rob—according to all the stories Turner had read. What place in Elmsford would be most likely?

Ben groaned when he tried to figure it out that way. Elmsford was small, and there wasn't much worth robbing, but it was still a haystack when one started looking for the needle of a possible robbery objective.

Then the hardware man came across something that started new ideas popping. In an old desk he found a batch of real estate folders. All of them came from the same source—Cass Ferris, Elmsford's biggest realtor, who had offices on Grand Street.

Ferris was a shrewd old skinflint who didn't trust banks—to the chagrin of Harrison, the town banker. Turner had recently fixed a shade in Ferris' private office. He had seen the big old-fashioned safe there. He knew that Ferris kept a lot of cash in that safe, relying on a burglar-alarm system for additional protection.

Burke could have gone to that office on a pretext of business and so "cased" the job. Turner felt an urge to get in touch with Cass Ferris at once, to see just what the set-up was in that safe.

There was no telephone here. So he hurried back to his coupe. Burke was still away—Turner had kept a very alert ear cocked for him this time. He climbed into the coupe, putting the package of recovered tools on the floor. He drove fast.

NIGHT was falling, and the street lamps were on when he parked the

car near Ferris' offices. Ferris occupied a small two-story building, with a front entrance on Grand Street and another entrance in a dark alley running between this building and the next. The office was closed. Ben looked up at the second floor window. A big shade was down.

Turner crossed the street, went into a drug store and called up Cass Ferris' home. A housekeeper answered. She said Ferris had gone to a show in the city, wouldn't be back until late.

He thought next of calling Police Chief Barton, but changed his mind. No use making a fool of himself. He really had nothing except the hunches that had built up ever since Burke bought those tools. He'd have to get more than that to show Barton. He telephoned his wife Kate, who was home now. After listening to her upbraiding, he said:

"I'm down on Grand and Oak Streets. I may be late. Don't worry."

He didn't want her calling the police to look for him, which she would if she really got worried.

He left the drug store and stood watching the dark building across the street. He told himself he was a fool. Even if he had the right hunch, why should anything happen tonight? Then he thought—why had Burke waited until today to buy those tools? Why had he driven off with the satchel?

The night deepened. Ben Turner grew hungry and thought of supper going cold and Kate going hot. But he waited stubbornly. Maybe he was all wrong. Maybe the real estate pamphlets meant nothing. Maybe, even if Burke was a criminal, he meant to pull something somewhere else.

A sedan, coming quietly down Grand, turned into darker Oak Street. It passed under a street lamp, and Ben Turner saw that it was green.

His heart thumped against his thin chest.

He felt like a detective out of one of his magazines as he crossed the street at a careful diagonal. He slipped furtively onto Oak Street and stopped in the darker shadow of a tree.

The big figure of Mr. Burke got out of the sedan, which had parked at the curb. Burke was carrying that familiar satchel, and he too, moved furtively. It was hardly necessary, for things were very quiet

on Grand Street at this hour.

Turner hesitated, saw where Burke was heading and did not immediately follow. Instead, when he knew Burke was out of sight, he hurried to the green car, his hands digging into his hardware-laden pockets.

A minute later Ben Turner left the sedan and was on Burke's trail. The big man had gone into that dark alley on one side of the building Cass Ferris owned. Ben Turner moved behind him like a stealthy cat. His right hand was in his pocket, gripping a large wrench. It ought to be easy he thought. It certainly would be a pleasure, after what Burke had done to him.

In the gloom, he saw Burke put down the satchel. Even war-emergency stuff would do to cut burglar alarms and effect entry. Ben Turner crept closer. He started to take the wrench out of his pocket.

That was when he heard a slight, scuffling sound behind him. He tried to yank out the wrench and turn, but he had no chance. Something very heavy crashed down on his soft hat, which alone cushioned its impact against his skull. The night became full of many stars, most of them falling and shooting. Then it became very black.

When he first came out of it, Ben Turner thought he was in the throes of a nightmare engendered by reading too many detective stories.

Surroundings assumed slow and incredible shape. Light from ceiling bulbs dazzled his aching eyes. The huge, dull-green form of a metal safe came into his vision. He sat up groggily on the floor. He realized that he was upstairs, in Cass Ferris' private office.

Burke was standing close by holding a glinting automatic—yes, that had been a gun in his pocket. Two other men were busy at the large window, putting some cloth material in all the chinks the shade itself did not cover.

The stockier of the two men turned around. The light gleamed on his very bald head.

"An old blackout shade," he said. "That's a break—we can work with all this light, and no worry."

His companion, who looked like a scrawny, wrung-out version of him, with hair, was putting away a blackjack which

he still gripped, the weapon, Turner realized, which had given him that blow on the head.

"Are you sure it's okay, Burke? That snooper there we caught—"

"He's just a hick hardware guy, I tell you," Burke growled. He noticed that Turner was sitting up and pointed the automatic at him. "He's been pestering me all day, sore because I bought some tools he seemed to want back. I don't know how he came here—he must have tailed me somehow when I went to pick you up in the woods."

Turner's aching mind grasped things then. The facts were becoming hideously clear. The Slagle brothers—who looked like their pictures—had been hiding out in the woods. They hadn't dared show themselves because they were marked as wanted men. But Burke was not a wanted man. He'd come down to Elmsford and "cased" this job for them, and bought those tools.

**P**UZZLEMENT grew on him again at the thought of the tools. Now Baldy Slagle was looking over the big, old-fashioned safe. He looked disgusted.

"What a can! Me, the best man in the business, having to waste time on a relic like this!"

"We need the dough," Nick Slagle said. "We got fifty grand in hot lettuce we can't spend—we need some cold dough."

"So that's why you picked on Elmsford!" Ben Turner heard his voice croak hoarsely, like a frog's.

Three pairs of eyes looked at him as if appraising an animal for slaughter. Burke gave him a little kick, enough to send him over backwards with his stomach sick.

"Shut up, snooper! One peep out of you and you get what's coming to you anyway!"

Baldy Slagle peeled off his coat, looking like a man ready to do a good bit of work. He unbuttoned his shirt. Helpless and fascinated, Turner saw him take a gargantuan necklace from around his neck. He took off three sections of steel, a little wrench and some bolts. Magically, he transformed this into a yard-long jimmy, with a pointed nose.

"Open up the satchel with those hick tools," he ordered. "I hardly got a look at them, but they sure look like low-grade

stuff. Lucky they worked on the burglar wires."

Burke glared at Turner.

"You gyp! All the time you told me it was high-grade stuff. Overcharged me two dollars, huh? You took me over plenty!"

Turner was silent. In his silence he was making many wishes, all of them without much hope. The purpose of the tools was now patent. Baldy Slagle had his own homemade instrument, but he needed other tools to supplement it, tools he didn't have, and for which Burke had been sent.

Now Baldy was fitting one of the drill-bits into the brace. He approached the safe. His brother helped him. They managed, between them, to turn the big heavy safe around, so that its back was exposed. Baldy went to work, quickly and professionally. He started to drill.

Turner watched, in awful fascination. There was a sudden snap. Baldy cursed.

"Give me another bit!"

Soon came another snap.

Turner began to feel more hopeful. That war-emergency stuff was terrible, to say the least. Baldy cursed it. He managed to make only a small hole in the safe before the last bit broke.

"I'll have to manage," he raged. "But it's gonna take a lot longer than we planned, thanks to that dope Burke!"

Burke winced and glared murderously at Turner.

Baldy took up one of the small crow-bars now, and tried to widen the hole he had made. He broke the crowbar, which was only cast-iron and brittle. He broke two more. His bald pate began to fill with pearls of sweat from hard if not honest toil. He was making a lot of noise too.

Nick spoke in alarm.

"Listen, if it takes much longer someone's bound to hear the racket. Better run outside, Burke, and take a gander. If anyone's wise or any copper is about, give us a signal. I'll watch this hick."

He took out a gun of his own and stood over Turner. Burke, growling in his throat, went out of the office. Baldy redoubled his efforts. The floor was full of broken tools. Baldy was lifting his own homemade "can-opener" now, trying to insert its point in an inadequate hole in the safe. It made a grinding, crunching

sound. Nick turned momentarily to watch.

Ben Turner gathered strength and flung himself at Nick's scrawny legs. The tackle carried both of them across the room, towards the window. With Nick still off-balance and Baldy springing into action, Turner made a desperate grab at the window shade, got it, jerked wildly.

The shade flew up with a report like a pistol. Turner had known it would, because he himself had fixed the roller for Cass Ferris.

But almost as fast it came down again—the light from the office would have shown only for an instant to sleepy Main Street. Baldy had yanked down the shade while Nick, recovering his balance, poked his automatic so hard into Turner's ribs that he thought they'd break.

"One more move and you get it! That's a promise!"

Turner couldn't even think of one more move. His hopes sank still lower as Burke returned now, a grin on his surly face. Burke was carrying a familiar package.

"Nobody around at all and look what I found! I spotted this hardware bird's car on Grand Street, and got a hunch. You see, there was something about these tools that looked different. The dirty rat switched them in that bungalow, that's what I found out! Here are the ones I bought—they were right in his car!"

Baldy emitted sounds of approval as he looked at the good, newly-released stuff. But he tempered it with a little worry.

"You sure must have boned up your moves, Burke! This hick must have suspected plenty! Well, we'll be getting out of here in a minute now, so I guess it'll be okay."

ONCE more Baldy went to work. It was really remarkable what he did, with good tools in his hands. It was a shame, Turner thought, that he hadn't used his talents for something honest.

The hard-steel bit worried a nice big hole into the back of the safe. The small crowbars tore a little of the side out of the hole. Then at last the huge 'can-opener' was properly inserted. Baldy worked that big thing up and down like a pump handle. Metal ripped through metal. In minutes, the back of the safe was opened like a sardine can.

Greedy fingers reached in. Stacks of

currency ruffled in the lighted room. Burke chortled.

"Almost twenty grand! Not bad for a hick town haul!"

"We'll count it later," Baldy commanded. "Let's get out of here."

"We leave the snooper, huh?" The way Burke pointed his gun at Turner indicated the condition in which he wished to leave him.

"No, take him along! Just in case anybody gets onto us, he might make a good shield!" Baldy said.

Nick and Burke both seized the lanky Turner. He couldn't resist, and didn't try, knowing that if he succeeded they'd kill him here. Baldy followed with the tools and loot. They all went out of the alley door, past the cut burglar alarm wires. The night was dark and quiet. But it was very late, Turner reflected.

He realized then—and the spark of hope still within him flamed a little—that they were all headed for Burke's parked green sedan. That explained something that had puzzled him. Burke must have gone to the woods hideout to fetch the Slaughter brothers. He had let them out of the car some distance from this building, so they could sneak here quietly on foot, while he came on with the car and tools. That's how they had managed to gang up so unexpectedly on Turner in the alley.

Burke opened the front door of the sedan, slid in behind the wheel. Baldy climbed in the rear, putting the loot on the floor. Nick forced Turner in with his gun, and the hardware man sat crowded between the two brothers. He waited, silently praying, while Burke got the motor going and let out the clutch.

There was a whirring sound. The car didn't move. Baldy cursed.

"Hurry, get started!"

"Something's wrong!" Burke exclaimed. "The wheels are turning but we're not moving!"

He slid out to see, and his curses were blighting. Turner knew what he was seeing. When Turner had stopped at the sedan before following Burke into the alley, he had found an auto-jack in the tool chest. He had put it under the rear axle, raised it just enough to lift the wheels off the road and balance them.

Burke removed the jack and the car plopped down a little. The big man

climbed back in.

"I only hope you let me give it to this snooper when the time comes!" he snarled. "This is his work or I miss my guess."

"He'll pay for it, but get started!" Baldy raged.

Burke got started. The car rolled up Oak Street. It rolled smoothly for perhaps half a block. Then a detonation split the night, followed soon by another, and the car was jouncing along like a crippled thing.

"The tires! A coupla tires!" Burke wailed.

Turner was not surprised by this either. He had also found time, while at the sedan before, to reach into his pocket for a handful of heavy-duty tacks. He had sprinkled them in front of the car generously. He had done all this thinking Burke was alone in the event he failed to get Burke himself, to insure a delay in Burke's possible getaway.

Now Burke was stopping the car. All three thugs were bewildered and confused, but Baldy was shouting:

"Come on, let's get out—we're waking the whole town!"

He had one of the rear doors open, was half out of the car. Nick was opening the opposite door. Turner seized the opportunity as they momentarily forgot him. He leaped towards the front seat.

They had frisked him for weapons but he was so full of tools they hadn't bothered with the stuff. He found the wrench still there—and he brought it down crunchingly on the head of his hated enemy, Burke. Then he leaned over, straddling the seat-back, and reached for the horn-button. He had a large tack in his hand now, and he pinned it between the button and its circular holder. The horn jammed and blew long and monotonously.

At last the things he had been waiting and praying for, began to happen. A car careened around from Grand Street and there were people running after it, pointing at the scene of commotion.

Out of the car leaped Chief of Police Barton and two stalwarts of his small force. Baldy and Nick almost ran right into them, and the police guns covered them before they could do anything about it.

Ben Turner, exhausted but triumphant,



did one more thing before calling it a night. He searched the pockets of the unconscious Burke and extracted two dollars. No reason for giving the rat that discount!

"But it was really thanks to you, Kate, that the chief found me," Ben Turner admitted to his buxom wife, when he finally got home. "When it got late and you worried and told the chief where I was—on Grand and Oak—he remembered what I'd been telling him. He drove around that way. And thanks to the delay and the rumpus, he found me and those criminals."

Kate shivered in her bathrobe.

"To think you caught the Slagle Brothers! And you'll get a reward—"

"Yes, and another reward too—"

"From Cass Ferris, whose money you saved?"

"No. The old skinflint, when he came back from the city, was mad because I didn't save his safe as well as his money. But at least he's agreeing to put his money in the bank. And banker Harrison gave me a hundred for accomplishing that!" He took his wife's hand, patted it. "We'll have enough to buy that house out of the town limits now, all right."

"And I suppose," Kate said, "you'll want to become a detective now, eh?"

Ben Turner shook his head.

"No. I learned something, Kate. I'm not a detective." He thought of the high-quality tools he had saved, and his voice filled with pride. "I'm just a darned good hardware man!"



## Looking Forward to Our Next Issue!

**C**RIME stalks the wild Border town of Laros—where gambling and corruption flourish—in **MERRY MONTH OF MAYHEM**, a swift-moving novelet by C. S. Montanye. Private eye Steve Dix is the hero—and the job he picks for himself when he agrees to investigate some of the shadier elements of the town is no cinch. In fact, it lands him square in the middle of a frame! The whole story's told in the next issue in **MERRY MONTH OF MAHEM**—a taut, tense and terrific crime yarn!

\* \* \* \*

**T**HAT famous sleuthing pair—Dwight Berke and his wife Gail—are back again in **MURDER IN MY BONES**, next issue's spine-chilling novelet by Carl G. Hodges. Di and Gail are out for a scoop when they go to interview John Cummings—and sure get it when they find Cummings dead! Their next job is to discover the why, when and wherefore of the crime—and you'll follow their activities with bated breath as they pursue conflicting clues.

\* \* \* \*

**B**AFFLING is the word for **THE THREE STRANGE MEN**, the novelet by J. Lane Linklater also scheduled for our next issue. When Ted Bixby is run out of a citrus-growing city by three hoods armed with menacing guns, that's only the beginning of his troubles! You'll find **THE THREE STRANGE MEN** a winner crowded with suspense, action, excitement and surprises!

\* \* \* \*

**I**N addition to the foregoing headlines, the next big issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE** will bring you many splendid stories of crime and mystery by favorite writers. Look forward to an enjoyable reading feast.



"The boss wants you to raise your hands, coppers," the intruder said

# MURDER'S NEVER FUN

By DON JAMES

*When newspaper reporter Alice Reins accompanies Inspector Glaze and Mike Clancy to see what's cooking, the heat's on for fair!*

**A**LICE REINS was in the press room at Headquarters during her second week covering police for the *Examiner* when the call came in that Johnny Segulio had been found murdered in his apartment.

Mike Clancy and I were climbing into a Headquarters' squad car when she arrived, out of breath.

"Inspector Glaze, can I go with you?" she blurted at me.

Clancy grinned as he slid behind the wheel and touched the starter. He already had remarked how the world had changed when a newspaper had to hire women to cover police, but good-naturedly had charged it off to a woman's wiles and a city editor's susceptibility.

I was going to snap a quick "No!", but she was pretty and excited, and already was getting into the car. Mike still grinned as we swerved out of the garage, and the siren began to howl. The girl was squeezed in next to me, her eyes glued to the pattern of unfolding traffic before us.

"Some fun, Miss Reins!" Mike said and missed a street car by inches.

"Murder's never fun," I growled. "Stop wise-cracking and slow down. It doesn't make much difference to Segulio if we get there in a hurry or not."

He slowed down, but he kept the siren howling. The girl was getting the thrill of her lifetime.

"This is my first murder!" she informed us.

"You're not supposed to be riding with us," I reminded her. "The Chief doesn't like it."

"I won't tell him. Will you take me into the apartment?"

"Do you want to be sick?"

"What makes you think I'd be sick?"

"Murder is usually messy," I told her.

"Maybe Segulio was the glamorous racketman when he was alive, but he won't be now that he's dead. As I got the report, someone shot him through the head and the bullet didn't come out gently. I don't think you'd like to see it."

"I've a job to do," she said tartly.

The way she said it made me angry. She sounded as if she thought I was someone who discounted women.

"Okay," I nodded. "That's fine. You come into the apartment with us. That'll be just fine."

"Thanks," she snapped.

WE RODE the rest of the way in what silence Mike would give us from the siren and came to a stop in front of the apartment house where two prowl cars had attracted a group of on-lookers. We elbowed through them and into the building. Alice Reins stayed with us.

I broke regulations to let the girl come into the apartment with us, picked a spot near the door and stationed a cop from a prowl car beside her.

"If you want to watch how we handle a case, watch, keep still, and if you're going to be sick, get out in a hurry," I

told her.

She looked at me defiantly.

"Where's the body?" she asked.

I was standing in front of her so that she couldn't see it. I stepped aside and let her look. She swallowed hard and her eyes wavered for a second, but she took a good look.

"All right," she said. "May I stay?"

"If you'll keep out of the way," I said, and turned from her and went to work.

Within ten minutes other boys arrived and we were into our routine. I had my note-book out. A photographer was busy, another man was sketching the scene and taking measurements. A fingerprint man was on the job. The medical examiner stood around and waited until we were ready for him. He didn't have to examine Segulio to know that he was dead.

Segulio was stretched out on the floor of the luxuriously furnished living room. A bullet had done a bad job on his head. We'd already found the spent slug across the room.

Things were going according to schedule, so I turned to the prowl car cop who stood beside the girl.

"Who found him?" I asked.

"Cleaning woman," he said. "We've got her outside."

"Bring her in."

She was middle-aged and scared to death.

I got her name and address and her story. There wasn't much to it. She had come in to clean up the place and found the body. She screamed, ran out into the hall and got the elevator boy.

They brought in the elevator boy next. He told how he had summoned the manager who had called us.

"Was anyone up here to see Segulio earlier this morning?" I asked.

"Yes. There were—"

"Hold it," I interrupted. I'd suddenly remembered the *Examiner's* new police reporter. "You can leave now," I told her. "You've had an insight to a homicide investigation. From now on we'll keep the questions and answers strictly police."

She nodded. "Thanks," she said, and left the apartment.

I turned back to the elevator boy.

"Go on," I prompted. "Someone was

up here to see him."

"A girl, and later a man."

"About what times?"

"The girl was here around ninety-three. The man about ten—an hour ago. The girl stayed maybe ten minutes and left. The man stayed about the same."

The medical examiner looked up and didn't bother to let me ask the question.

"He's been dead a little over an hour, I'd say," he announced. "Temperature still up and the room isn't too warm."

The elevator boy was trying to keep his eyes away from the body and he looked pale.

"Do you know either the girl or the man?" I asked.

"The girl was Mae Fleur. She dances down at the Gaiety. The man was Ike Keff."

I let the kid go for the time being, and used the telephone to send out a pickup for the girl and Keff. Then I went out into the hallway. Alice Reins was making notes in her own blue note-book. I wondered idly if girl reporters would ever start using folded sheets of copy paper as most of the men did.

"Do you know who did it?" she asked.

"Maybe," I said.

"Any names you want to mention?"

"Not yet. From now on you'll get your releases with the others. We have to get along with the *Journal* and the *News* as well as the *Examiner*."

"That's fair enough," she admitted.

"May I ride back with you—if you're going back?"

"Sure. But without benefit of siren." I smiled.

**BY NOON** they had brought in Mae Fleur and Ike Keff. I ordered cordite tests for them. If either had not worn heavy gloves and had fired a gun recently, we might pick up evidence of it with a test.

The tests were negative, but I remembered that Keff usually wore gloves.

I talked with the girl first. She was something to look at. It didn't make much difference if she could dance or not. Just to have her on a stage would be enough.

"You know why you're here?" I asked.

She nodded. "Someone killed Johnny. I was up there this morning, but he was all right when I left."

"Did you kill him?"

"No."

She looked at me intently, a crystal hardness in her eyes. If she'd had a sentimental attachment for Segulio, it was well concealed, or else he was dead now and erased as far as she was concerned.

"How friendly were you with him?"

She lit a cigarette and thought it over.

"You've fingerprinted the place and me," she finally said. "You'll find plenty of mine in the apartment and they're not all in the living room."

"His girl friend?"

"Until two or three nights ago. We had a fight—and don't try to pin that on me as a motive because it wasn't, and I didn't kill him."

"What did you fight about?"

"He was taking out another girl. I simply didn't like it."

I was surprised that any girl with eyes as hard as hers could be jealous. Or maybe it wasn't jealousy. Maybe she liked the money Segulio would spend on a girl.

"How did he get along with Ike Keff?" I asked.

She smiled tightly. "Are you kidding?"

I knew the answer as well as any cop in the know, but I wanted to hear what she had to say about it.

"I'm asking the questions," I reminded her.

"He hated Ike, and Ike felt the same way about Johnny. Any punk on the skidrow could tell you that."

"Do you think Ike killed him?"

"I don't think about murder. That's your job."

I wasn't getting anywhere with her, so decided to skip it for the moment. I'd talk with her later if I had something to tie up the questions into a bundle. I let her go and they brought in Ike.

He was short, stout, and looked greasy. He sat down opposite me and began to turn a diamond ring absently on a chubby finger.

"You have a lot of explaining to do," I told him flatly.

He nodded, his forehead creasing with worry.

"I went up to see Segulio," he said, "but he didn't come to the door. I was there probably around five or ten minutes ringing his bell. After that I went back down. That's all I know about it."

I watched him fool with the ring on his finger and thought over what I knew about him. He and Segulio had been jockeying for territory over a period of years. Both of them had records with us, but no convictions, and that wasn't our fault. We had done our best.

"You didn't go in and kill him?" I asked.

He smiled crookedly.

"My mouthpiece should be here about now," he said.

I sat back and looked at him. It was starting all over again. Maybe I could hold him because it was a murder case, but Sam Golder, his attorney, probably would manage to get him out within an hour in spite of my efforts. I had to have something solid, to hold him. In the meantime, he wouldn't try to get out of town. That would pin the mantle of guilt on him too closely.

I asked him more routine questions, but he was leaving the answers to Golder. Finally I turned him loose, warning him to stay in town.

"Send for me if you want me," he said.

"I'll let the D.A. decide about that. Just stick around."

After he had gone I went to the window and stared down into the street trying to decide what to do next. I hadn't got very far.

Suddenly I stiffened a little at what I saw below me. Keff came out of the building and walked across the sidewalk to a taxi. A girl was with him and I recognized her. She was Alice Reins.

They stood for a moment beside the taxi and she talked rapidly. He was shaking his head, but finally nodded. Evidently she was trying hard to get a story.

He opened the door to the taxi and I grunted out loud when I saw her slide into it. He followed her. . . .

FOUR hours later Harry Lieb, city editor of the *Examiner*, called me.

"Bill, I'm probably making a darned fool of myself, but I'm worried," he said.

"About what, Harry?"

"Alice Reins, that girl we have covering police. She seems to have disappeared about four hours ago. We've checked everywhere and can't find her, but one of the boys from the *Journal* told us that he thinks she was getting mixed up in the Segulio case."

"He's probably right," I agreed, and began to reflect some of Harry's worry. Ike Keff wasn't a man to be playing around with.

"I wonder if you'd—" he said hesitantly.

"Sure," I interrupted. "We'll try to find her. She's probably all right, but we'll make certain."

"Thanks, Bill," he said, with a note of relief in his voice. "I'll let you know if we hear anything."

I picked up Mike and we found Ike Keff at his night club where he had an office.

He was sitting behind his desk when we walked in. Two of his men lounged in easy chairs. Obviously they had been in conference when they heard us coming down the short hallway.

He shook his head impatiently.

"Sam Golder does my talking," he reminded me.

"This is something else," I told him. "When you left Headquarters I saw a girl get into the taxi with you. We're trying to find her."

One of his men struck a match and lit a cigarette. The noise sounded loud in the room. I watched Keff's eyes. They returned my look steadily, but he was playing again with the diamond ring on his finger.

"The dame covering police for the *Examiner*?" he asked.

"Alice Reins." I nodded.

"She tried to get me to answer some questions about Johnny Segulio's murder. When I wouldn't talk, she got out of the taxi. I came on here."

"Why did you ask her to ride with you?"

"That was her idea. I didn't ask her." He smiled crookedly. "She's a good-looking dame and I've never been interviewed by a gal newspaper reporter. I thought I'd get a kick out of it. She

was sore when I let her out. I guess she thought I'd give her a big story—only I haven't any story about Johnny Segulio. Just what I told you."

"Where did she get out of the taxi?"

"Main and Fourteenth, I think."

"You didn't bring her here?"

He shook his head.

I stepped around to the side of his desk. Some unopened letters were near the corner and I had seen the strip of blue paper beneath them. Carelessly I shoved the letters aside and looked down at the small note-book with the blue paper cover.

The room was very still again as I lifted the cover and glanced at the writing on the top page. In neat, penciled notes were condensed versions of book-ings from the police blotter. The writing looked as if it were a woman's hand. I flipped through pages to the last full page. It had notes on Johnny Segulio's murder.

"Where is she?" I asked. "This is her note-book—and don't tell me she lost it in the taxi and you brought it along. She left it on your desk and it got under the letters where you didn't notice it."

Abruptly the silence in the room became menacing. From the corner of my eye I saw Clancy stiffen and his hand wandered upward toward the opening of his coat where his shoulder holster nestled. The two men who worked for Keff no longer were lounging in their chairs. They were tense, and looked as if they were about to spring.

"I think Clancy and I will take a look around this joint," I said.

"Only with a search warrant, Glaze," drawled Keff.

"We'll skip the formalities. I don't think anyone will mind too much."

Keff looked away from me to the doorway and nodded slightly.

"The boss wants you to lift your hands, coppers," a rasping voice said.

A small, dark man stood in the doorway. The gun he held looked too large for his hand, but I noticed his eyes the most. You get to recognize the symptoms of dope and the small man was loaded with it.

**M**IKE'S hand darted under his coat. That was a mistake. The large gun

in the man's hand cracked sharply and Mike jerked back. He didn't go down, and instinctively one hand clasped over the wound high on his shoulder.

One of the other men quietly took our guns.

"We'll throw the book at you for this," I told Keff.

He shook his head. "You won't get the chance."

He looked at the small man. "They came alone?" he asked.

"The car is parked in front. They're alone."

Keff nodded to one of his other mugs. "Get their car and put it in the garage. We'll use it tonight," He smiled again and his fingers turned the diamond ring. "Late tonight Glaze and Clancy and the girl will drive over the bank up on Hell's Canyon road. It's a thousand feet down. A bad accident—and right after the two coppers evidently found the girl and were driving back to town with her. People will have to guess about that. They'll all be dead."

The car keys were removed from Clancy's pocket while he muttered solid curses under his breath and nursed the crease in his shoulder where the bullet had burned him.

"And since you're looking for the girl, we'll help you," Keff said. "In fact, we'll tie you up in the same room where she's tied up."

He laughed softly, with distorted humor. . . .

Alice's eyes were frightened as she watched them tie us. She was in a chair, and her arms and legs were tightly bound, but I noticed that they had used broad, flat strips of folded sheet material. They weren't taking chances of cord marks showing on our skin when we were found dead.

Their plan was neat and sensible from their point of view. I wondered what she had done or learned to make her that dangerous to Ike Keff. The gag they had in her mouth prevented her from answering any questions. The gags in our mouths prevented us from asking any.

They left us, and Mike growled through his gag and tried to work free from the strips that bound him. After a few moments he gave up and looked



at me stolidly. His eyes were worried. I knew that mine were, too. This was the toughest spot I'd ever been in.

We sat that way for hours. The girl's eyes locked with mine and she seemed to be trying to tell me something. Once or twice they became frantic with fear and I knew that she was thinking about what might happen to us. I tried to smile with my eyes, but it wasn't much use. I was afraid, too.

I thought of a great many things. I thought of a hundred plans to get us out of the room, and dismissed a hundred plans. I began to think about dying, and shook that out of my mind. The girl was watching me too intently, and fear was in her eyes again.

Mike stared fixedly at the floor. Once in a while he would try to get loose again and after struggling for moments would give up with a perplexed, worried frown. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead and slid slowly down into his eyes so that he blinked.

Finally it was dark and we couldn't see one another, but I could hear the other two breathing. Mike's nostrils were a little clogged from the tail end of a cold and he had trouble breathing with the gag in his mouth.

The flat strips were tight, but their flatness allowed circulation and I was thankful that my arms and legs had not become numb. There was a chance when they took us out to the car that I could make a break.

After a long procession of slow hours, the door opened and then we were herded out of the room, stumbling and unsteady from cramped muscles.

I didn't get a chance to make a break. There were too many of them and they kept our hands tied.

We walked down stairs and into an alley. The large door of a garage slid back and they pushed the girl on the front floor of our squad car. A man slid behind the wheel and another sat beside him, his legs over the girl.

They crowded Mike and me on the floor in the back of the car and two mugs stationed themselves over us. I looked up into the muzzle of a gun.

Another car in the garage started and then our squad car purred into life. We pulled out of the garage and through the

alley to swerve into a street. I could hear practically no traffic. That meant it was past midnight.

"Everything okay?" the driver asked.

"Okay," the man beside him answered. "They're right behind us. Head for Hell's Canyon and take it easy. There's a call out for this car. We don't want it spotted."

**WE DROVE** easily and at a moderate speed. I tried to judge the distances from turns and the sound of traffic. We would soon be on the arterial highway leading out of town.

It would be a half-hour drive up the grade of the highway beside Hell's Canyon, then probably they would turn around. They would get out of the car, set the steering wheel, untie us, put the car in gear and jump as they released the clutch. We would crash through the guard rail.

I wondered how it would feel to fall through space. The final crash on the canyon floor, and then darkness. An eternity of darkness for the girl and Mike and me.

The man beside the driver spoke again.

"Take it easy. That's a prowler car ahead of us. It'll turn off soon. Don't let him get a look at us. They're looking for this car. These cops have been gone too long and they're worried."

"I'll watch it," the driver snapped.

We slowed, and I knew that they were waiting for the prowler car to draw away from us.

A frantic desire to shout, to do anything to attract the attention of the prowler-car cops made me struggle. The gun muzzle slashed across my forehead and I was quiet.

"They're getting ready to turn off," the driver said.

This was our chance and none of us could do anything about it. I chewed at the gag. Maybe if I could get my mouth free I could shout and attract their attention.

Suddenly from our squad car came the shriek of our siren. It wailed alarm in the night and filled the darkness with its piercing loudness.

The men in front swore loudly and there was a flurry of movement. Then

the driver was stepping on the gas and we were swerving down the highway.

Another siren cut into the air and abruptly ours stopped, but the siren behind us howled steadily.

We careened down the road. The men above us clamped down on us hard with their legs and one of them turned and smashed the rear glass. A shot cracked in the car. He was shooting at the pursuing prowler car.

"Get down!" he muttered. "They're shooting back!"

I heard the answering shots and another report sounded loudly beneath us. The squad car men had hit a tire. The car swerved sickeningly, crashed into something and turned over. I hugged my arms around my face as well as I could and tried to stay relaxed. Mike jolted against me and grunted through his gag. One of the men above me screamed, and the sound of crunching, screeching metals filled the car.

We jerked again, then settled slowly on one side. It was quiet in the car. Outside, the siren that had followed us moaned to quietness, and abruptly a flashlight darted over us.

It went out as a shot sounded and car tires skidded to a noisy stop on the highway.

The cop began to shoot and another gun sounded beside him.

"Behind the car!" one of the cops snapped.

The shots continued. I knew that Ike Keff must have been in the car that had followed us with others of his men.

Someone screamed yards away from us and almost as an echo sirens sounded in the distance.

"The cops radioed for help while they chased us!" I thought.

A motor roared into life and gears ground. One of the mugs on top of me tried to move. A car door pinned him down and when he moved warm liquid trickled into my face. The man moaned.

The flashlight was full in my eyes again and Mike was trying to squirm free.

"You okay, Inspector?" a cop said.

I nodded and the voice of the other cop said:

"Mike and the girl are okay. They were on the floor. One mug is dead, one

is hurt—don't think he'll live. The other two are out cold."

Hands helped us out of the wrecked car and police cars swerved to a stop beside us. Men piled out of the cars.

"Go after that car that got away," I croaked as soon as the gag was free from my mouth. "Ike Keff's in it."

"We've radioed ahead," a cop told me grimly. "Two state cars are waiting for him down the road."

**A**LICE REINS rubbed her lips and tried to keep tears out of her eyes.

"The siren?" I asked her.

She nodded. "When you took me on that run I saw how Mike worked it—the floor switch. They had me on the floor where I could see it. When I heard them say there was a call out for our car and not to let the prowler car see us, I squirmed over and kept the switch down with my forehead. I kept my arms over my head. They had only my hands tied. The driver kicked, but all it did was hurt my arms."

Mike nodded approval. "That siren got plenty of attention." He grinned broadly. "You sure used your head, young lady!"

The girl managed a smile at his attempted humor.

"One thing more," I suggested to her. "Why did Ike want to get rid of you?"

"I had a theory, and suggested it to him," she admitted nervously.

"What theory?"

"I asked him if it wasn't true that he'd been chasing around with Mae Fleur. I knew it was true because our night club columnist told me he'd seen them together last week. I asked him if he killed Johnny Segulio."

"Go on," I prompted.

"He asked me if I had a theory of how he could have killed him. I said that Mae Fleur might have helped him and gone up to see Johnny Segulio. When she left she could have unlatched the door to his apartment so that Ike could go in and surprise Johnny, and kill Segulio before he had a chance to defend himself."

I stared at her. Only a neophyte would dare suggest such a thing to Ike Keff.

"What did he say?" I said.

"He asked me how anyone could prove

that. I told him that lie detectors work out pretty successfully in modern criminology, and that you might try it on Mae Fleur if it were suggested. I said I thought she probably is the kind of girl who would tell the truth to save her own neck if the going happened to get too rough for her."

"Then?"

She shrugged slightly. "He looked at me for a moment and his lips got tight. Then he said, 'You've guessed too blamed much, and you're probably right about Mae. We won't take chances. That dumb cop Glaze won't figure it out unless you tell him—and you'll never tell him.' He called in a couple of his men and you know the rest."

"So I'm dumb!" I snapped angrily. "Why, I'll—"

She smiled and her eyes were looking into mine.

"I was never so glad in all my life to see anyone as when they brought you into that room," she interrupted. "I knew then that everything would be all right!"

Suddenly I realized that I was going to be glad to have her around me, covering police. In fact, I was going to be glad just to have her around me at all.

Mike chuckled softly. "That's right, young lady. Everything was all right then. And you sure used your head—on that switch!"

Even I laughed then!



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Big Boy's fist clipped my chin, and I went back against the wall

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# THE EGG IN THE BIER

By A. J. COLLINS

*Murder strikes down nine victims, and when Private Detective Jimmy Bristol discovers boiled hen fruit in Pete Baxter's casket it begins to look as though he might be Number Ten!*

## CHAPTER I

### FRIEND RACKETEER

THE Club Trinidad, one of New-ark's flashiest night spots, was jammed with customers. Cigarette smoke swirled above the mob at the bar, and somewhere inside, a name band was playing sweet music. The couples at the bar were all intent upon their own affairs, and no one paid any attention to me when I asked the bartender for Tony.

"He's upstairs in the office, Mr. Bristol," he answered. "You can go on up."

That was nice of him. I backed away from the bar and walked into the other room. The dance floor was a seething, shuffling mass of humanity. I steered clear of them and made my way to the telephone booth at the rear of the room.

The booth was a booth and it wasn't a booth. The telephone it contained passed calls, but if you dialed Tony's private number, one side of the booth opened on a buzzer release and you could climb the long flight of stairs to Tony Caputo's office.

Slick, eh?

There was a blonde inside the booth, passionately mouthing the transmitter.

I waited patiently for her to wind it up. The girl was more than a little tight and I had no way of knowing how her session with the mouthpiece would turn out.

She finally banged up the receiver and climbed out of the booth. She looked at me a little ambitiously. I winked and she beat a hasty retreat. I went into the booth and dialed Tony's number.

"Who is it?" he inquired.

"Jimmy Bristol, Tony," I told him. "I want to see you."

"C'mon up," he invited.

He hung up and the door release rasped quietly. The panel behind me opened noiselessly and I climbed the long flight of stairs that led diagonally to the second floor. Tony was waiting for me at the head of the stairs. He gave me a big grin, exposing a mouth full of gold. His extended hand showed two diamond rings.

"It's good to see you, Jimmy," he said. "C'mon in."

Tony Caputo was a little guy. He was stocky, and his oxford gray suit fitted him beautifully. He had been a boxer at one time, but his handsome, intelligent face was unmarked. Tony's last fight had finished him in the ring. That had been ten years ago, when my dad had still been running our detective agency and I was a sports reporter on one of the local gazettes.

EVERY other boy in the business had blasted Tony for tossing that fight, but I was sure he hadn't and said so. Since then, Tony and I had been friends. Thinking about my reason for this visit I couldn't help wondering if it was going to stay that way.

He led the way into his beautiful furnished office. His desk was a glass-topped, white oak monstrosity, set in the center of the room. The big chairs were white leather. Exactly opposite the two big, Venetian-blinded windows was a white leather covered bar.

A tall, lovely redhead was behind it, mixing drinks. She gave me a bright smile and lifted inquiring brows. She was exquisite, from the top of her head to the top of the bar. That was as far as I could see.

"Make mine rye," I said answering

her unspoken question. I dropped my hat on Tony's desk and sat down.

"Flame," Tony said genially, "this is Jimmy Bristol, a private detective and a friend of mine. Jimmy, this is Flame. Flame Saunders. A nice girl."

I grinned. "Tony, you're not kidding," I remarked. I had heard of Tony's lovely red-headed babe, but this was the first time I'd seen her. "She's terrific," I added.

Flame gave me a nice big smile for that and her brilliant, white teeth were a treat to see. She came out from behind the bar and I was able to see that the rest of her, too, was exquisite.

She handed me my drink and sat down upon one corner of Tony's desk. He was behind it by now and he looked up at her with amused admiration in his big brown eyes.

"She makes the office look good," he said.

"She'd do that for any office," I pointed out. "By the way," I asked her, "can you take dictation?" She smiled. "For me," Tony said, "she don't have to."

He sipped his highball and stared at me with eyes that changed expression. The good-natured amiability seeped out of his face and he looked unhappy.

"Too bad you had to come on business," he said finally.

I didn't say anything. Flame finished her drink, glanced at her wrist-watch and stood up.

"I've got to go," she said, smiling. She saw my wrinkled brow and explained. "The band is going to broadcast soon. I want to hear it."

She placed a tiny kiss upon Tony's cheek, and left us. With solemn eyes, Tony watched her go. He looked up at me.

"She's a good kid," he remarked. Then he got down to business. "I guess you figured out that Petey Baxter was a good friend of mine," he said bluntly.

"That's right, Tony," I said. "Not only that, but you're the only boy I know with the brains to figure out a fool-proof robbery like that. It had to be you."

He accepted that without a flicker of expression.

"How do you figure into it?" he said.

"The insurance company. I handle



their work.

"I don't suppose you'd believe me if I told you I didn't have anything to do with it?"

I set my empty glass down upon the glass-topped desk and the room grew suddenly quiet. The soft, sweet melodies of the band downstairs came to us clearly and the lovely voice of a female vocalist sang the words.

"I'm afraid not, Tony," I said finally.

He surprised me. He grinned at me. He leaned back in the swivel chair and made steeples with his fingers.

"Tell me what you got, Jimmy," he invited. "I think you're making a big mistake, but if I can help you, I will."

I opened a white leather cigarette box on the desk, appropriated one and lit it. He sat back, beaming encouragement.

"Day before yesterday," I said mechanically, "an armored car containing bonus pay envelopes for the Barbour Aircraft workers was on its way to the plant. All told, the amount of money it carried was a little in excess of four hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

"Just before the truck reached the plant, and, while it was riding through a lonely stretch of road, a high-powered car roared past. Someone inside tossed out a hand grenade. The car got away in time, but the truck went up. After the explosion the bandit car came back and got the money.

"There were six men in that truck. All of them were dead except one. He was badly wounded, but just before he died, he got his hands on a gun and shot one of the crooks. That turned out to be Petey Baxter. By the time the police got there, there were seven corpses and no money. That's about all."

**T**ONY was still grinning.

"That was a clever caper," he said judiciously. "But it hurt me to have you think I would pull a stunt like that. Anyway, I can prove I was here all the time. The cops fingered me, too."

"Tony," I said wearily, "I know you weren't in that car. But I really think you planned it, and I think you have the dough. Petey was one of your boys. He was your right hand, as a matter of fact."

"Yes," Tony said soberly. "I'm gonna

miss him."

Abruptly he got to his feet and strode toward a door set into the wall. He opened it and swiftly withdrew his hat and coat.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "I've got to go and see Petey. I can't make the funeral tomorrow, so I'd better do it tonight. It's not far. Suppose you come along with me. I want to think over all that you've told me."

It was a funny request. Maybe he did want to think. Maybe he was willing to deal. It's callous to say that I wasn't too much concerned over the murders that had been committed, but it was true. I wanted the money.

My client, the insurance company, would dicker for that dough and then let the police apprehend the killers. It was because I was hoping that I could effect a deal through Tony Caputo that I was here. If Tony hadn't sponsored the robbery, he'd sure have a good idea who had.

So I went along to see the last remains of Petey Baxter. We made our way down the long, sloping stairway and exited from the telephone booth one at a time.

Tony went first. A few minutes later, I followed.

The booth and the private stairway, together with the swanky office, kept concealed from the cops and general public, were Tony's personal whims. Actually, though, the only one fooled by the setup was Tony. It had been a cop who first tipped me to the upstairs office.

Flame Saunders was perched upon a stool at the bar, drinking an old-fashioned and gabbing with Tony. He told her about our intended destination. Flame shivered a little and smiled at me.

"Take good care of him for me, won't you?" she said pleasantly. Her interest in Tony was a little synthetic and certainly not in keeping with the predatory gleam in her eyes.

I grinned at her and lured Tony outside. We paused at the curb and looked around for a cab. It was only ninthirty, yet already the Trinidad was turning them away. It was going to be a busy evening.

## CHAPTER II

## MARKED "D.O.A."



ONY hailed a cruising cab and we got into it.

We had ridden for several minutes when I noticed a sleek black sedan behind us. Through several turns, the sedan stayed on our tail. I'd never have noticed, I suppose, if it hadn't been for the fact that the big car had no lights. Tony didn't see it, I guess. Maybe I was all wet, too.

Our hack halted in front of one of Newark's swankiest mortuaries. Tony pushed a five-dollar bill into the cabbie's hand and strode swiftly inside. I followed a little more leisurely.

I saw the big sedan pull into the curb a few hundred feet away, still without lights, and I was a little worried. I cursed my stupidity, as I recalled that my gun, a Smith & Wesson 357 Magnum was lying on my living room floor. I was wishing I had it now, because I wasn't sure that there wouldn't be trouble.

I had been cleaning the gun in the afternoon, and had just finished wiping it off when the telephone had rung. I remembered laying the gun on the arm of the sofa and getting up to answer the phone. I jarred the couch and the gun fell off and landed between the arm of the couch and the wall. I had forgotten about it, because I couldn't see it, and I'd been thoughtful about the phone call. The insurance company had wanted action. They were getting it. As I entered the mortuary, I wondered if Tony had a gun.

Petey Baxter was laid out in grand style. His face looked almost handsome. I stood beside Tony in the subdued light and looked down into the coffin. The lower section of the lid covered Petey's legs and the top half was open.

Tony didn't say anything, just stood there staring down into the face of his erstwhile friend and employee. The odor of flowers was overwhelming and I turned away and moved closer to the door.

The room was crammed with floral pieces and it was my guess that every

racketeer in the city had marked Petey's passing with a gift of flowers. Tony passed a hand across his forehead and I was beginning to wonder if the odor was getting to him too.

As we stood there, an attendant came into the room, with a sympathetic expression upon his face. He fairly exuded professional sorrow as he approached Tony.

"Beat it, bud," Tony snarled at him. "We want to be alone."

The guy disappeared fast. Tony turned away at last and joined me. We made our way toward the front door.

"Petey was a good guy," Tony said solemnly. "A nice boy."

We had reached the front door and were about to go out into the street, when Tony happened to glance down the street. He didn't say anything for a long moment.

"You wait right here, Jimmy," he said then. "I want to take a last look at Petey alone. I won't be long."

He walked swiftly back into the room we had just left. When he came back a few minutes later, the thick, cloying fragrance of the flowers lingered in his overcoat and all about him.

We walked outside and paused at the curb. There was not a cab in sight. The sedan started up and crawled toward us. I saw a window open, and light from the street lamp glistened upon the shiny snout of a submachine-gun.

"Tony," I yelled, "duck!"

Simultaneously I dropped behind a car parked at the curb. Tony was late. The submachine-gun chattered as the sedan passed the short racketeer and Tony dropped like a sack of meal.

There was a sudden roar as the driver of the car fed power into its cylinders and the big, sleek vehicle slid away like a streak of light. It disappeared around the corner a scant second later. I didn't see the license plate number for the simple reason that it didn't have one.

UNHURT, I got up and went over to Tony. He was oozing blood through his overcoat in the region of his stomach. It didn't look too good. A cab came cruising past us and I hailed it.

The driver was a pretty decent sort of guy. He helped me get Tony inside and

started speeding for the nearest hospital. He didn't stop for anything. When we encountered a light that was red, he just went right on through it.

I had Tony's head cradled in my lap. He was looking up at me with a white, tortured face. He was conscious, and mumbling something about dirty rats.

"Take it easy, kid," I said soothingly. "We're taking you right to the hospital. You'll make it."

"S'too late," he said weakly. "Good guy. Tried to warn me. Trying to save m'life."

He subsided momentarily, and blood welled up onto his lips and churned itself into a froth there.

"Petey got it," he said with an effort. "Petey got what you want. You get it from Petey." Once more he mumbled weakly, "Good guy."

His head dropped limply and rolled just a little. His eyes were wide and almost rolled up into his head.

"Take it easy, bud," I called out to the cab driver. "Tony's dead."

The hackie swore feelingly, as though Tony's death was a personal loss. I learned later that the driver had got a lot of favors from the racketeer.

We took Tony's body to the hospital, because we didn't know what else to do with it. He was accepted as a D.O.A. and I was asked to remain until the police arrived. The cab driver and I chewed the fat until the bluecoats showed up, then we got a free ride to Headquarters.

Some time after midnight, the cops turned me loose and I got the bus on Broad Street that took me back to the Trinidad. I thought I might get a chance to talk with Flame and find out if she knew anything. But she didn't. She cried a little, but I didn't think Tony's death had hurt her. I even made a date with her for the next night.

My session with the cops had been anything but pleasant, and they had made a great deal out of my failure to do anything when Tony had been cut down right before my eyes. I told them about my gun and they had a merry laugh over that. I knew I would read all about that in the morning papers. A detective, witnessing a killing, and unable to do anything because his gun was

at home! Boy, would I take a roasting!

Flame had been sympathetic. She was the nicest gal I'd met in a long time. And, she had promised to go out with me tomorrow night. I thought about that all the way home.

The more I tried to think about Flame and her pulchritudinous proportions the more irritated I became. My mind was playing tricks on me and insisting with annoying repetition that I was forgetting something. Overlooking something. I couldn't think what it was. I was dead tired, and all I wanted to think about was Flame Saunders.

I put the car in the garage, and climbed the four flights to my apartment wearily. If I'd had any sense I'd have moved into a building that had an elevator. Then I thought about the housing shortage, and I felt better again.

I was exhausted by the time I got to my floor. I slid the key into the lock and opened up. I switched on the lamp by the door and got out of my topcoat.

I had the coat half-way off, when I realized that there was an unfamiliar odor in the apartment. Slowly I dropped the coat into a chair while I struggled to identify the smell. Then I got it. It was the same cloying scent of flowers I'd noticed in the undertaking parlor. Reluctantly, I guessed that the odor had seeped into my clothes and clung there. Taking off the topcoat had disturbed it.

I STARTED for the window, and abruptly, decided that I'd been wrong. A man I had never seen before walked out of the bedroom and stood in front of me, smiling ambitiously. He had a gun in his hand.

"Been waiting for you," he said. "What took you so long?"

I had one hand in my pocket, and while I stared at him I drew it out. There was a small handful of pennies in it, and while I talked I stacked them in my fingers and played with them aimlessly. The gun never wavered.

"I was down at Police Headquarters," I said mildly. "Who are you and what do you want?"

He was nothing but a youngster. He was built a little on the heavy side, but was almost as tall as I am, and I'm six feet. He could carry it nicely. He smiled

at me and I saw white teeth. His face was round and cherubic, but his dark brown eyes glittered in a way I didn't like. His hair was wavy and dark brown. Everything about him was brown. His suit, his shirt, his tie, his shoes. Just a cute little Brownie.

"What did Tony Caputo tell you?" he demanded harshly. "I want to know every word he said. Fast, too."

"Are you kidding?" I snapped. "Don't you know that I'm a detective? That I eat little boys like you for breakfast?"

That burned him. He came closer, a foot away from me, and shoved the rooty-toot into my middle. That kind of a gunner, I thought bleakly. My hands still played with the coins. I decided it was time for my gimmick.

I had been playing with the coins and letting him enjoy the jingle. Now I let them slip through my fingers and they bounced all over the floor. It's almost fool-proof. No one can rivet their attention when they hear money fall. He couldn't either. He glanced at the floor, watching the pennies scatter, and I had him. My fist came up and exploded against his pretty chin like an atomic bomb.

I twisted away from the gun at the same time, but that was unnecessary. Pretty boy went back and down. He slammed into a corner and laid there. I gave him a good inspection, just for luck, but he was a cold pigeon. I picked up his gun and dumped it into my pocket.

Then I went through his pockets. His wallet gave out a lot of information. He was John Warren, age twenty-seven, licensed to drive a car, and owner of a 1939 Buick sedan.

He had been Four F in the draft and still carried his card with him. The wallet contained about six hundred and fifty dollars, so he wasn't a working man. His fingers were beautifully manicured and his hands were soft and uncalledoused. So much for character study.

He had a bunch of keys in a soft leather folder, a handkerchief, a pocket comb, several small bills loose in his pants pocket, a little change, a pair of nail clippers and that was all. Apparently, he didn't smoke.

He was stirring by the time I finished.

He opened his eyes and stared up at me with a smirk supposed to indicate extreme hate, clouding his pretty puss. I grinned at him.

He didn't like the grin and muttered an epithet that cast reflections upon my ancestors. I laughed. He was in no position to get gay. He got to his feet slowly.

"So now what do you want?" I inquired mildly. "More?"

He shook his head and winced as pain shot through it.

"I've had enough," he said. "I'll go."

"You're not sure, yet," I pointed out.

"I want you to answer a few questions."

"I'm no quiz kid, Bristol," he snarled.

"I heard you were a bad guy to monkey with. You convinced me. So, I guess I'll just run along."

## CHAPTER III

### EXIT BROWNIE



WAS perched on an arm of one of the big chairs, watching the Brownie and wondering how much he knew. I got out his gun and waved it at him.

"Sit down, junior," I said. "I want to speak with you."

He dropped into a chair in front of me without a word.

"Who gunned down Tony Caputo?" I asked, for a starter.

"I don't know."

"What makes you think Tony said something to me? And how did you know I had been with him?" He had the colossal nerve to grin at me.

"I don't know—I don't know," he answered me.

The thing was becoming monotonous now. I stood up and moved closer to him. I hit him with the gun and knocked him cold again. I didn't have time to play with him any more. I had suddenly remembered what Tony had said to me just before he died, and I had a lot of things to do.

I pushed his limp carcass into the clothes closet and twisted the key in the door. Just as I started for the telephone, the buzzer rasped sharply. Once. Twice. And then whoever it was just left their finger on the button.

I wondered if junior's playmates were coming after him. When I opened the door, I had his cannon in my fist.

Inspector Roy Swift and Detective-sergeant Johnny Harms stood there in the hallway, grinning at me.

"He sure has a gun now," Swift remarked to his cohort.

"I'm glad to see you boys," I said swiftly.

I was glad, too. They could take Brownie off my hands and I could get out and snoop around.

Roy Swift is about six feet tall and almost as wide. He is a big boy. His round fat face was wreathed in a smile and his two gold-capped incisors were glittering at me as he pushed his way into the apartment.

"Jimmy," he said genially, "we thought we'd run up and have a little talk with you. After all, you know, you didn't tell us much downtown."

I glanced at my wrist-watch, and it was twelve-fifteen. "Aren't you calling a little late?"

"You know," Swift purred, "the taxpayers are entitled to our efforts at any hour of the day or night."

I got them settled in the living room. I broke out a bottle of rye and some ginger ale and we had highballs. Harms, a quiet, medium-sized man, sat silent in his chair.

Roy Swift listened patiently while I told them about my nocturnal visitor. They recognized his name and seemed only mildly pleased that they were about to collar him.

"I got him locked in the closet," I said, starting to unlock the door.

Swift stopped me. "Leave him there for a while, Jimmy. We have come to talk to you. We'll take him when we leave."

I sat down and got out cigarettes. Swift was sloshing the cubes in his glass around and regarding the whole business with unnecessary intentness. Finally, he looked up at me.

"Jimmy," he said heavily, "how about leveling with me?"

"Yeah," said Johnny Harms, parrot-like.

"What do you mean?" I was sparring and they knew it.

"You were with Tony Caputo when

he got it. You were the last man he was able to speak to. Couple that with the fact that Tony had a soft spot in his heart for you anyway, and you find a condition that needs examination."

Roy Swift was smart, one of the smartest men I'd ever met, and I could see the rapid addition he had accomplished.

"So?" I queried meekly.

Harms was beaming at me. Maybe he thought they were getting somewhere.

"What did you go see Tony about in the first place? And what made you go see him?"

His second question tipped me to the fact that he knew the answer to the first.

"I'm investigating that armored car heist," I stated bluntly. "When I found out that Petey Baxter was the only one of the crooks killed, I figured Tony might have something to do with it."

**R**OY SWIFT set his empty glass down upon an end table.

"So you went to see Tony. You thought you could ask him and he'd say, 'Why sure, Jimmy. That was one of my jobs. Here's the money back. We won't do nothing bad like that again.'" Swift's eyes froze and his mouth puckered. "Who in thunder do you think you're kidding?"

"Yeah," Harms tossed in. "Who do you think you're kidding? Huh?" The guy was strictly a yes man. A stooge.

"Simmer down, Inspector," I said wearily. "Have another drink. I'll tell you where I fit in."

I made up more highballs and passed them around. There were sounds emanating from the closet. Swift got up and pulled out his police positive. He twisted the key and pulled at the door. Brownie stood there gazing at the Inspector with shocked amazement written all over his face. He exhibited a marked reluctance to rush the gun.

"You get back in there and shut up," Swift told him. "You're going downtown with us in a little while. You're under arrest." He shut the door in Brownie's white face.

"When that armored car holdup happened," I said, after Swift got back into his chair, "I had no interest in it until the insurance company called me and

sicked me onto the case. More than half of that dough is in registered bills. Registered because they were big and new. I figured that if Petey Baxter was in on it, Tony Caputo was behind Petey. Tony has planned every successful robbery here in town in the last few years. You know it; I know it. But you fellows never could pin anything at all on Tony."

I PAUSED and gulped a mouthful of my highball.

"Go on," Swift encouraged. "You're doing fine. You should be writing stories."

"Yeah," Harms said. "Stories."

Roy Swift laughed at Harms too. The poor fool was pitiful.

"You guys are interested in the killers," I said. "I'm not. I want to see them caught, of course, but as an agent for the insurance company I thought I could talk to Tony and point out that the insurance company would make a deal and buy back all of that marked money at a small fraction, if it could be worked out. You know that's being done every day."

"Well, Tony laughed at me. Then he asked me to go with him while he went to see Petey. He said he was going to think. You know the rest."

"Not quite all of it," Swift corrected. "Tell us again about the car that knocked him off. Tell us every little thing he said or did."

"You figured Tony for the job too?"

"I'm as bright as you," Swift said. "We were watching Tony pretty close, waiting for a break."

"You weren't watching so close when he got knocked off."

"So we pulled a boner."

Swift listened attentively while I told him all about Tony's untimely demise and the conversation that had preceded it.

But I said nothing about Tony's last words. That was for me.

Eventually, Swift got to his feet and opened the closet. Brownie came out meekly.

Harms slipped a pair of twisters onto one of the prisoner's wrists and they went out.

As soon as the door closed behind

them, I started getting into my coat. They had been gone less than a full minute when I heard the sound of shots outside.

I snapped out the lights and got a window open. On the sidewalk below me, I could see Harms and Roy Swift crouched behind a police car at the curb, trading shots with two indistinct figures across the street. Brownie lay face up on the sidewalk.

Something in the grotesque position of the body told me he was dead. I got his gun in my hand in a hurry and snapped two swift shots at the figures. One of them cursed loudly and I guessed I had tagged him.

SWIFT and Harms caught on quick. They didn't even look up, but went right on pumping bullets into the darkness on the other side of the street.

Windows began going up all along the street and people began chattering idiotically. A big black sedan, glittered under a dim street lamp a few feet away from the crooks. One of the figures across the street dashed toward it, got the door open, and the other one made a dive for the front seat. The driver got the car in motion and roared away, while Swift and Harms and I all pumped lead at the tires.

We never did find out what we hit, but it wasn't a tire. Swift got into the police car and gave chase. I went downstairs to keep Harms company while he guarded the corpse.

Swift came back in less than five minutes. He was mad. He reported a complete failure.

I left them there on the sidewalk and went inside my apartment building, through the long hallway and out the side door. It would seem silly to let them know that I had business at one-thirty in the morning.

They'd certainly have wanted to know all about it.

In the street behind the apartment building, I hailed a cruising cab. I had him drop me off in the neighborhood of the mortuary Tony and I had visited, and wherein Petey Baxter was still ensconced.

The place was closed tighter than a war plant after V J day.



## CHAPTER IV

## NIGHT CALL



QUIETLY I walked through an alley that led to the garages in the rear, and encountered plenty of activity. A hearse was parked in the areaway and there were lights in several of the rear rooms. While

I huddled in the dark, two tall, thin young fellows came out and lit cigarettes. They stood in the doorway smoking. They didn't see me.

"That blasted smell drives me cuckoo," one of them remarked.

An odor had accompanied them and I could sympathize with him. I decided the smell was formaldehyde, and let it go at that.

The other fellow didn't say anything. He drew smoke into his lungs hungrily, and the cigarette tip glowed so brightly I became worried for fear I might be seen.

Finally they went back inside. Moving slowly and silently, I went around to the other side of the mortuary. I could reach a window from the ground and if I remembered rightly, Petey Baxter was reposing in that room.

The window was unlocked and I pushed it up gently, noiselessly.

The same overwhelming odor of flowers hit me again as I climbed inside. The dank, clammy odor of death also was in the room with me, circulating in the ebony blackness. Moving an inch at a time, I found Petey's bier. My hands felt along the polished surface and I found that the top lid had been lowered.

It was cold in the room but perspiration came out all over me. It rolled down my back and my legs. Everything considered, I wanted to get out of there in a hurry.

Swiftly I clawed the lid open and began feeling around in the coffin. Tony had come back to the bier after he had noticed the death car approaching. Too, he had told me that Petey had what I wanted. Well, here I was, and here Petey was. Maybe we could do business.

My fumbling fingers encountered Petey's folded hands and I almost

jumped a foot. His flesh was stone cold, clammy and creepy.

I lowered my field of exploration to his legs. I found a small, hard oval lodged between the side of the casket and Petey. I pulled it out and stuffed it into my coat pocket. I didn't know what it was, but I knew it didn't belong in a coffin.

Any plans I might have had for further examination of Petey's bier disappeared in a hurry. I heard footsteps approaching and I decided it was time for me to go. I got out of the window in nothing flat and I didn't pause to close it. Lights flashed into sudden brilliance in the room I had just vacated, and I got out of the neighborhood in a hurry.

I paused under a street lamp several blocks away and got out the object I had found. It was an egg!

There was nothing remarkable about the egg. It was just a plain egg, unmarked and undistinguished by any unusual characteristic, except the place wherein I'd found it. The egg in the bier!

I finally flagged down a cab and went home. Brownie's gun was still banging around in my pocket. I pulled it out and laid it on an end table, determined to turn it over to Roy Swift in the morning.

Then I went to work on the egg. I looked it over with a magnifying glass. There wasn't a thing on it. I shook it and decided that it had been boiled hard.

So what it all figured out to was simply that Tony had been carrying around a hard boiled egg in his pocket, and when he thought he might be killed, he had hidden it in Petey Baxter's casket. Maybe he had hoped to avoid death and return later to reclaim the egg.

Then, convinced that death had caught up with him, he had told me that what I wanted was in Petey's possession. Therefore, the egg was my reward for trying to warn him of impending death.

But what was I supposed to do with it? I finally put it in the refrigerator and went to bed. I was so tired I dropped off to sleep almost immediately.

Heavy knuckles pounding upon the door brought me out of my slumber. The dull gray light of dawn was coming in the windows and I was reluctant to

crawl out of bed. I grabbed up Brownie's gun and opened up.

**I**T WAS seven o'clock in the morning and Inspector Roy Swift and his reptitious henchman looked as if they hadn't slept.

"Don't you ever open your door without grabbing a gun first?" Swift growled irritably as he came inside.

"This is your ex-prisoner's gun," I told him. "Take it. I meant to give it to you last night but I forgot."

Swift took it wordlessly. He and Harms prowled around the place like bloodhounds. Brownie's gun went into one of Swift's capacious pockets.

I put coffee on and waited for them to tell me what they wanted. Swift thawed out a little when I poured him a shot. I gave Harms one, too, but on him I felt I was wasting it.

They kept on prowling until I fed them some coffee laced with the rye. Swift sat down, with his overcoat on and the coffee on an end table next to his hand. He lit a cigarette and looked at me, frankly suspicious.

"I don't suppose you'd care to tell me what you were doing last night or this morning rather, about two o'clock?"

"Sleeping," I said mendaciously. "Why?"

He sighed heavily and sipped his coffee.

"About two o'clock this morning, thugs broke into the morgue and swiped Tony Caputo's clothes. The attendant got hit in the head and doesn't know anything. Later, the mortuary that has Petey Baxter reported that the room had been broken into and the lid of the casket raised. A window close to the bier was found open."

"Very interesting," I said.

"We looked the place over," Swift continued. "Two hours after we had left, Petey's corpse was disturbed again and the casket thoroughly searched. They even tore out the padding. Petey was found standing very stiffly in a corner."

"Yeah," Harms said, "standin' up in a corner." He pushed his nose back into the coffee cup.

"So what do you want from me?" I said.

Swift was guessing a lot, but it was all good guessing.

"Did you break into that mortuary and find something in Petey Baxter's casket?" The Inspector was right on the beam.

"Are you kidding? I've got necrophobia?"

"What the devil is that?" Swift growled.

"That's a fear of dead people and death."

"I'm not going to fool with you, Bristol," Swift said. "If you did flush something out of Petey's coffin, the hot shots that followed you will guess it and be up to see you. So far, nine people have died in this case. You might be Number Ten."

Swift let that sink in. Maybe he was right, but I wanted to break the case myself. And I wanted to recover the dough myself. If the cops retrieved it, the insurance company might decide they didn't need me.

"You can come to my funeral," I said. Swift stood up and ponderously started for the door. Harms followed like a puppy.

"It would be a pleasure," the Inspector said in parting.

I got out of my bathrobe and had another cup of coffee. While I sat drinking it I started thinking.

Quite obviously Tony had put the egg in Petey's coffin. But what did it mean? And who else knew he had the egg? What was it supposed to mean?

That wasn't enough to worry about. How long would it be before Roy Swift began to realize that I might have found something that would lead me to half a million in stolen pay envelopes? Swift wouldn't believe that I planned on returning it. Half a million is an awful lot of dough.

I poured another cup of coffee and decided to give the egg another going over. I opened the ice-box and got it out. My bathrobe was coming undone and I set the egg down upon my kitchen table while I fastened the cord of the robe. The next thing I knew I heard a crackling smash and the egg was lying on the floor. The hard shell was cracked in a thousand little pieces but still adhering to the egg.

THERE was no point in trying to save it intact now. I peeled the shell off and found what Tony had intended me to find. Brown wavery letters appeared upon the white, glistening albuminous surface of the hard boiled egg.

There was a name and two dates.

Harry C. Bower  
1900-1941

I remembered the trick from the days when I was a kid. I remembered that there was some way you could write upon the shell of an egg and the words would appear inside. I couldn't recall how it was done, but evidently Tony had known all about it.

The name didn't mean anything to me but the dates did. Harry C. Bower had been born in 1900 and died in 1941. The place to look for him would be a cemetery.

Concentrating on the robbery, I realized that Tony would bury the dough, and a cemetery was the right place to do it.

I dialed a number and in no time at all I was talking to Johnny Walsh, the guy who issues the burial permits. He checked his records and told me that Harry C. Bower had died in November of 1941 and had been interred in Idlewild Cemetery.

I went into the bathroom and started dressing. I wasn't expecting company, but I should have been. After all, if the guys who also were after the egg had robbed Petey Baxter of his cozy berth and had been following my trail, it was inevitable that they should finally come to see me.

They were sitting in my living room when I came out of the bathroom. Two of them. One of them was a big, beefy guy with two front teeth missing, and a small cannon resting in his lap. His companion was thin and tall, with a tiny mustache and hollow cheeks. He was leaning against the wall and enjoying my surprise.

The big boy pointed the cannon at me and smiled. "Hello, smart guy," he purred. "You should lock your door." The other bird didn't say anything. He stepped forward and gave me a going over.

"He's clean," he announced finally.

Big Boy got to his feet and he was massive.

"We want to talk to you," he said amiably.

He slammed the gun against the side of my head, but I'd seen it coming. The gun slashed my cheek open and knocked me down, but I wasn't out. I got up slowly, certain that I was in for a most unpleasant session.

The thin guy was still leaning against the wall. He didn't say anything as I stood up. I shook my head to clear it, and Skinny hauled off and clouted me in the mouth. Blood spurted from my smashed lips and I slammed back against the opposite wall.

"This is just to tune you up a little," Big Boy explained pleasantly. "We want answers to our questions and we ain't got no time to waste on you."

"Where is the egg?" Skinny queried mildly.

I didn't tell him that the egg was lying out in the kitchen on the table. I didn't say anything. Big Boy put the gun back in his pocket and Skinny got his cannon out.

"I'll give him a little bouncing around," Big Boy said ambitiously. "He'll open up."

## CHAPTER V

### BIG BOY OPENS UP



BIG BOY started for me and as he got in close, I lashed out with my left hand and slammed him. The blow annoyed him about as much as a mosquito sting. His big fist came up and exploded in my face. I went flying back into

the wall, bounced off and almost into his waiting arms.

He hit me again and red streaks exploded in my brain. My mouth was a pain-filled mess of crushed flesh and my teeth were loose. My face was cut and blood was streaming down onto my suit.

"He ain't said nothin' yet," Skinny remarked impatiently.

"Give him time," Big Boy said. "He will. He'll chirp like a canary boid."

"Where's that egg?" Skinny de-

manded all over again.

"I ate it," I snarled at him.

Big Boy wound up and his fist looked as big as a basket ball when it finally hit my chin. I went back against the wall with a force that shook the building, and slowly sagged to the floor. I was dizzy with pain, shock, and a white-hot, murderous rage. I was sure I was going to pass out, but I didn't.

I sprawled there on the floor, my head down between the wall and the end of the couch. I lay there for a moment, trying to clear my head, while Big Boy started prowling around the room, poking into everything in sight.

Then I saw the Magnum. It was the most beautiful sight I've ever seen. Lying there within reach of my fingers was my gun.

Slowly I reached out and got my hand around the butt. Then I started backing out gingerly, appearing for all the world like an unconscious man regaining consciousness.

"He's ready for more," Skinny said.

He leveled his gun at me again as I sat up on the floor. My hand with the Magnum in it was still behind the couch. Big Boy started for me again with murder in his eyes. Watching, Skinny grew a little careless with his aim.

Just before Big Boy got to me, I snaked my hand out and blasted Skinny right straight into perdition. The slug crashed into his chest and I felt a twinge of pity as I realized what that mushrooming bullet did to him.

He pitched forward on his face. Big Boy dived at me. I pulled the trigger again and the slug caught him in the shoulder, pushed him straight up and over.

I could have told him that the Magnum was the most powerful hand gun in the world, capable of remarkable destruction; but I didn't. He knew it.

He was out and I sat down thankfully in the nearest chair. I was in bad shape. I heard the doorbell going crazy but I was too weak and too badly beaten to get up.

Lieutenant Roy Swift and Harms broke the door down. They found me drooping in the chair, with blood still seeping out all over me. Awkwardly, Harms tried to fix me up. He was wash-

ing my face with a cold wash rag when Flame Saunders came up. She said she wanted to talk to me. She was lonely.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she cried in a hurt tone. "What have they done to you?"

I was so glad to see her I snapped out of it long enough to give Swift the story. He told me he had been trailing my two playmates and had heard the shooting.

"These two guys and the one they shot the other night," I said, "are the guys that pulled the job."

Flame was washing my wounds for me and tenderly petting me at the same time. I was really having a grand time.

"We were right about Tony," I pointed out. "He did plan the holdup and when it was over, the boys turned the loot over to him. He put it away, then he took an egg and wrote the key to its hiding place on the inside of an egg." Swift gave me a peculiar look. "It's a trick," I explained hastily.

**B**IG BOY was beginning to stir now. Swift put bracelets on him just for security. Harms was watching Flame with his heart in his eyes. I didn't blame him, for she was a very pretty girl. She was cooing over my wounds like a mother hen.

"The boys wanted to split up the dough and start spending it," I went on, "but Tony wouldn't allow that. He knew that a lot of that dough was registered and he wanted to make sure the heat was off before he let any of it be used.

"So he and the boys had a difference of opinion. They gunned him down. Then they started looking for the egg. I found it in Petey's coffin. But Tony had told me it would be there. He spotted the kill car and hit it there. If he got away alive he could retrieve it. He didn't, and when he was dying he told me that Petey had what I wanted. That's all there was to that."

"Okay," Swift said. "Harms can take this bird downtown and send for the other one."

He started for Big Boy. The guy was conscious now and moaning with the pain from his shattered shoulder. Harms called Headquarters for help.

"Now, you and me will go get the money," Swift said to me. "Where are we going?"

I didn't answer him. I asked Flame if she would stay right there in my apartment and wait for us.

"You know I will, Jimmy," she purred.

Swift got a hand on the doorknob and lured me outside.

It was still early, only around eleven in the morning, and we didn't have to drive far. Idlewild was on the outskirts of Newark, almost into the Oranges. We had no trouble getting inside the grounds. The big heavy iron gates were wide open and somewhere behind the galaxy of monuments and tombs some unfortunate character was being laid to rest.

I wondered idly, as I scanned the names upon the tombs, if Petey Baxter was the character. His funeral had been scheduled for this morning.

Harry C. Bower was housed in a square, squat-looking mausoleum near the far corner of the cemetery. But, the big bronze doors were securely locked.

We parked the car close to the big stone building and were almost invisible to the casual observer. I had a few gadgets in the glove compartment and it took all of them to get those big doors open. But open them I did.

The interior of a tomb is a most impressive place. Harry C. Bower was buried beneath a short runnerlike rug that stretched from the door to a small marble altar, beneath a stained glass window. There were candles and wreaths upon the altar.

"I wonder if we have to start digging," Swift growled.

I didn't know. I leaned against the altar, wondering where to start looking, and the altar moved.

A few minutes later we were looking at the loot from the payroll robbery. It had been concealed behind the altar. The money was still in the envelopes. The lids had been torn from two dark red lock-boxes, but the envelopes were inside these. One by one, we got them out and loaded into the car.

Not a soul came around and no one observed us as we locked the big doors again and drove out the long roadway.

"That was a cute trick," Swift remarked amiably. He was in high glee and even willing to allow me a little credit.

We turned the money over to the authorities and I notified my client, the insurance company, of its recovery.

Then Swift drove me home. He was afraid I would never make it alone. Flame was still waiting when we got there. She was a gorgeous doll and I hated to do what had to be done. Swift lingered for a drink, then started to go.

"You'd better take Flame along with you," I told him.

Flame's pretty red lips fell apart in surprise, and fear glistened momentarily in her lovely eyes.

"She in it, too?" Swift said.

"Jimmy," Flame exclaimed, "you're fooling!"

"No, baby," I said soberly, "I'm not fooling. I hate to sell you down the river, because I could figure out a very pleasant future for you, but you've got to go, too. Tony wasn't such a bad guy, and I'd always be wondering when you'd sell me out too."

"Where does she fit in?" Swift demanded.

**FLAME** was trembling as she waited for me to speak.

"Think about it," I advised. "When Tony pulled the egg trick, it presupposes a big question. Why? I'll save you time and give you the answer. He wanted someone he would leave behind him to get the dough, in case he got killed. Who?"

"Flame," Swift answered swiftly.

He began regarding her with an intent expression and downright suspicion.

"The night Tony and I went to pay our respects to Petey Baxter, we told Flame where we were going. No one else knew. Tony had the egg with him. When he spotted the car with his killers in it, he realized that his lovely redhead had sold him out. So he went back to the coffin and put the egg in it.

"When he died he didn't ask me to give the egg to Flame. He told me it was for me. Next, last night these boys had somebody driving for them. Remember how fast that sedan got away? That was Flame driving the car."

Swift started for the redhead and she was fumbling in her purse with white-

(Concluded on page 113)

# KILLING TAKES CONFIDENCE

By CURTISS T. GARDNER

*Two hundred grand was Jerry Dixon's for the taking—but he'd have to murder a man first, and that was the joker!*

## CHAPTER I

### VOICE OF THE TEMPTER



IT WAS not too warm in the air-conditioned parlor car. But moisture dampened Jerry Dixon's high, intelligent forehead. Two hundred thousand dollars! His for the taking. Only one thing he would have to do first. He would have to kill a man!

A man he had never seen. A man he didn't even know. Just the name. Joe Flinckman. No one could possibly connect Jerry Dixon with Joe Flinckman. No one knew of the telephone call Dixon had received from Flinckman that same noon.

Dixon had been alone in Mammoth Mutual Insurance Company's Tampa office. He had returned from the Atlanta sales meeting only an hour before. Miss Richmond had been out to lunch. George Schenley, the local claims man, was away in Jacksonville handling a serious case concerning Workmen's Compensation.

"Fort Marsden Beach calling," the operator had said as Dixon picked up the receiver.

Fort Marsden was on the Gulf coast. Two hundred miles south of Tampa.

"Okay," he had said. "Put it on."

The voice that had come over the wire had sounded weak, hesitant.

"I need to speak with the manager of your company. Tell him it's Joe Flinckman."

The name had meant nothing to Dixon.

"This is the manager," he had said, without interest.

"I've got to see you at once. Here."

The odd urgency in the stranger's tone had reached through to Dixon.

"Why?" he had asked curiously.

"It's about the bank robbery at Jackson City. You know—the First National?"

Dixon knew. Mammoth was stuck two hundred thousand dollars on the Bankers' Blanket Bond they carried on the Jackson City bank.

"What about it?" he had asked.

"I can recover that money for you," Flinckman had informed him tensely.

DIXON had begun to share the other man's excitement. "How?"

"I worked in the bank," Flinckman had said. His tone had been even more hesitant than at the start. "Ten years. Then they fired me. I must have been crazy for a while. I planned the robbery. With three others. We were supposed to meet afterward and divide, but I've changed my mind. I want to make restitution. On condition that the charges against me be dropped."

"Bring the loot here," Dixon had ordered crisply. "I'll see what can be done."

"I can't possibly come to Tampa," Flinckman had said. "I wrote my partners what I intend to do. They're looking for me. They'd knock me off before I could reach your office."

Dixon had been silent a moment. "Where's the money now?" he had asked then.

"I've hidden it. When you arrive I'll turn it over to you."

A big matter of this kind was way beyond Jerry Dixon's depth. It was

AN EXCITING CRIME NOVELET



In the act of falling, as he felt the numbing pain in his leg, Dixon tried to reach the woodbox



something for Home Office, for the decision of an executive. It was a claim department problem—not Dixon's affair at all. But he had ended by telling Flinckman he would start for Fort Marsden at once.

His decision had been partly force of habit, partly his own hopelessly white collar mentality. His early days with the company had been spent in claims work. Then, too, cooperation between the various departments had been the theme of the Atlanta meeting.

There had been no thought of personal gain in Dixon's mind at the moment. Simply the old, frustrated desire to do a good job.

His briefcase had been ready, just as he had brought it off the Atlanta sleeper an hour before. He'd had only time enough to catch the one o'clock Seaboard train southbound. Not even leeway to phone Christine, his wife. He had scribbled a two-sentence note for Miss Richmond, left it on her typewriter.

Not until he was actually on the train did he realize he was squandering valuable time from the reprieve Bill Diamond had given him. Time he should be spending in a desperate effort to get new business. When he attempted to explain, later, he knew the circumstances would be brushed aside as an alibi.

Bill Diamond, Vice-President and General Sales Manager, hard as his name and as brilliant, would confront him with figures on premiums written. That was all that would count. He was not being paid by the Claims Department.

Two hundred thousand dollars! Suppose he didn't bring it back? Suppose he kept it for himself? He could do just that and no one would be the wiser! He wondered the idea had not occurred immediately. He simply had not realized sudden wealth could be acquired so easily.

But the thought frightened him. Never before in his life had such a shocking possibility seriously occurred to him.

After the two-day meeting, a bad night on the sleeper, plus his own intense mental depression, he felt whipped down, exhausted. If he could nap, it would be good. He closed his eyes, rest-

ing his head against the green upholstered back of the parlor car chair. He tried to make his mind a blackboard on which nothing was chalked.

But he couldn't keep the mental blackboard erased. Pictures persisted. Coconut palms. Live oaks dripping with gray moss. How beautiful, how exotic Florida had seemed to him when he first came down here for the company!

And what a success he had thought himself! One of fifty branch managers. One of a select handful destined to reach high places in the huge insurance organization.

The palms and the Spanish moss had long ago become old stuff. Florida no longer seemed romantic. His struggle against odds too heavy made the whole territory hateful to him. And now—this idea of murder!

After a while he opened his eyes again. Fading daylight darkened the car windows. From across the aisle they gave back his own reflection. With a shock it came to him that he was nearly middle-aged. A beaten man with brand new worry furrows across his brow, and thinning hair always quite gray around the temples.

Hard work was what counted. That was what he had told himself at first. The law of averages would take care of him. He was capable of writing his own ticket. With the company. And with life.

Today, after fifteen years with the company he was only another unsuccessful salesman, facing a three-month probation period to produce, or else. He wished he had stayed with the Claims Department. He liked it better than sales work.

He shrugged. What department he worked with didn't matter. He simply lacked what it takes. He was the kind of nondescript man who does the work of the world, but can never quite make the grade.

**I**MPATIENTLY Dixon strove to force his attention away from such unpleasant thoughts. He zipped open his bag, took out the new sales portfolio given him at the meeting. He leafed its pages.

One thing about Mammoth Mutual—

the company was smart, progressive. This new sales tool was thoroughly modern. Bound in red imitation leather, its pages were doubled sheets of celluloid, like windows, in which printed exhibits, placed between the leaves, would stay fresh and unsoiled. They could be kept up to date simply by removing old ma-

insidious thought was already growing like the deadly virus of some malignant disease.

When the train pulled into Fort Marsden and he got up, he was surprised to find his knees shaky. That was what the image of himself as a murderer did to him.



In the doorway stood the black-jowled man with an automatic in his hand

terial and replacing it with new. The portfolio was Bill Diamond's latest brain child.

Jerry Dixon sighed. Even if he had good live prospects—which he didn't—he would be unable to use the portfolio effectively. Something had happened to his mind. It was so clogged with hurt, with doubt of his own ability that it couldn't function normally.

His was a complete mental block. Otherwise, he would never toy with this ghastly impulse to kill a man. But the

As he stood in the car vestibule waiting to get off the train, he thought that the chunky, black-jowled man just behind him looked vaguely familiar. Had he seen the man somewhere recently? In Tampa perhaps?

The streets of Fort Marsden were garish with neon signs. Crowds of gay winter tourists were everywhere.

Dixon walked the two blocks from the railroad station with his briefcase. He took a cheap room at the Bickford Hotel. When he turned from the desk, the

black-joweled man he had noticed on the train was signing the room clerk's card.

He lingered a moment in the lobby to hear a radio blaring warning of a tropical storm. Bred by a hot, dry spell, a hurricane had been milling around the Caribbean the past two days. Now it was swinging north. In a matter of hours it would hit Cuba. Unless unexpectedly diverted, the Weather Bureau expected it to reach the Florida West Coast somewhere between Collier City and Bocagrande. Which meant Fort Marsden would be squarely in its path.

Dixon didn't want to get caught in any storm. He had been through one tropical hurricane during his three years in Tampa. One was enough.

He felt very tired, but before climbing into bed he stood briefly at the window of his small room. No stars were visible in the overcast sky.

A strong breeze ruffled the tops of cabbage palms, sighed through the feathery poincianas.

If the wind hit tomorrow, Dixon found himself thinking, the storm would be particularly severe at an exposed location like Fort Marsden Beach. People got hurt in hurricanes. Suppose a piece of lumber should happen to strike Joe Flinckman? Flinckman was a stranger hereabouts. No one would be too much interested. Who would suspect a human hand behind the accident?

He found it unexpectedly hard to sleep. He could say he had come to Fort Marsden on the trail of a large new account. If the company had any complaint about the expenses involved, so what? Maybe when he got back to Tampa he would even have the satisfaction of calling Diamond in New York, telling the sales manager to take the job and shove it up his nostrils.

But small doubts were also beginning to creep in insiduously. How could he explain sudden wealth to Christine? Suppose he told her he had taken a flyer on the stock market. Would she believe him?

After a long time, he slept. But he didn't rest. His brain pictures still plagued him.

They were wild now. Fantastic. Incoherent.

## CHAPTER II

### STORM BREWING



WHEN Jerry Dixon woke, it was still dark. Cold sweat bathed him. The wind had risen, was still rising steadily. Rain slanted like a needle spray against the windows of his shabby hotel bedroom.

When tomorrow was over, he told himself, there would be no more two buck rooms in a dump like the Bickford. No more scrimping to save money for an enormously wealthy corporation. He would be a rich man. He could afford the best.

He and Christine would travel, sure, but for pleasure. They would visit the world's pleasure spots. Chateau Frontenac. Sun Valley. Maybe Paris, later.

Further sleep was impossible. He wanted to get up, dress, go out. Anything to get relief from his jangled nerves. He forced himself to lie in bed. It wouldn't do to show downstairs too early. There must be nothing unusual in his actions that someone might remember afterward.

For the same reason, after he had breakfasted in the hotel coffee shop, he put in a phone call to the Tampa office. If he didn't keep in touch, Miss Richmond might think it queer. He always phoned when he was out of town.

"You had a call from Home Office just before quitting time yesterday," she told him. "Mr. Diamond wants you to get in touch with him right away."

Jerry Dixon frowned into the mouthpiece. Diamond must scarcely have reached Home Office after the Atlanta junket. Of all the people in the company he didn't want to talk with now, the general sales manager headed the list.

"Got any idea what's on his mind?" he asked, trying to make it sound casual.

"No," Miss Richmond said, "but his secretary said it was urgent. She said I'd better make a Pullman reservation for you to New York."

"What's in the mail this morning?" Dixon changed the conversation.

Nothing but routine. There seldom was.

"You won't forget to call Home Office?" she asked anxiously.

"I'll call," he promised. "And I expect to be back sometime tomorrow. If I don't get held up by the storm."

He stood irresolute, scowling, after he had hung up. What could Diamond want?

Dixon shrugged. He wouldn't call now. He would wait until after he had Flinckman's bank loot. Then he would make a half-hearted attempt to sell the Fort Marsden Shipbuilding Company a Workmen's Compensation policy, so there would be a plausible reason for his trip down. After he had all his ducks in a neat row would be time enough to call Diamond.

As he walked to the bus station the rain stopped. But the wind blew in savage gusts which brought dead fronds tumbling from the palm trees.

The bus for Fort Marsden Beach was almost empty. Traffic, Dixon knew, would be heavier today in the opposite direction, as long as the buses ran. The beach was on an island twelve miles from town. Smart people would get away from such an isolated spot while a tropical hurricane was brewing. Unless they had some urgent reason to stay. Like Joe Flinckman. Or himself.

Just before the bus started, another passenger climbed aboard, a fat man, with flesh hanging baglike at his chin and puffing the fingers of his moist white hand on which a large ruby ring glittered. Small pig eyes met Dixon's, quickly shifted away as the man went past to a seat at the rear.

All the way to the beach Dixon stared from the window. But he was quite unconscious of the flat, sandy land rolling monotonously past. Actually he was seeing nothing. The old feeling of doubt and frustration was rising again, so strongly that his hands felt numb.

When the bus rolled across the short concrete span connecting with Seminole Island, it turned right, parallel to the Gulf, not more than three hundred feet distant. Between the road and the hard white sand were frame beach houses. Most of them were flimsy one-story affairs raised on stilts as protection against just such storms as the one now impending.

At intervals along the highway, streets were cut through to the beach. Dixon stayed on the bus until he reached the third intersection. This was Hibiscus Avenue. He got off then, walking along the white shell road toward the green Gulf water.

This was where Flinckman was to meet him. But the beach was empty. Not a living thing moved along the sand as far as Dixon could see. Lashed by the wind, angry green combers were dashing halfway across the fifty-foot-wide beach. Not even a pelican or a gull hovered above the waves.

DIXON glanced at his watch. Ten-fifteen. Fifteen minutes later than he had told Flinckman to expect him. He peered up and down the beach. For an instant he felt actual relief, as if an intolerable weight had been rolled from him. Maybe Flinckman had changed his mind.

The lift of spirit was fleeting. In heaven's name what was wrong with him? Did he actually want Flinckman to stand him up? Did he have so little courage left that he couldn't do this one thing that would fix him for life?

A voice from behind made him start violently. He spun on his heel. The man who had come up at his back was tall and stoop-shouldered, with an egg-bald head.

"You're from the insurance company?"

"Yes," Dixon said. "I'm the manager. You're Flinckman?"

The man nodded. Dixon picked a card from his pocket, handed it over. He had to clamp it firmly between thumb and forefinger to keep his hand from shaking. He felt a mild wonder at that. When he faced a tough prospect for a show-down decision, his nerves usually quieted. Waiting in an outer office was what made him jittery. Time for action usually found him confident and sure of himself.

The man was staring at the card. It had the company's emblem and Dixon's name, with the words "Resident Manager" beneath, and the office address. Dixon knew the title would be deceptive. No one not familiar with Mammoth Mutual would realize it meant exactly noth-

ing. No one would guess that he had no real authority, or that even the purchase of extra stamps for the outgoing mail must have Home Office approval. He wanted to be sure Flinkman believed in his importance. That was vital.

Flinkman kept the card. "I watched from my window," he explained. "I've been careful to keep under cover. Let's go where we can talk."

The house to which Flinkman led him was beyond the corner of Hibiscus Avenue. A two-story affair larger than the ones adjoining. Flinkman went in through the wide yard and around to the rear, with Dixon following. Glancing over his shoulder, Dixon noted that the beach was still empty, except for one solitary, stout figure toiling along the sand from a street intersection a good thousand feet away.

A rustling, crashing sound jangled his taut nerves. Only a heavy palm frond falling! Suppose it had struck Flinkman over the head? Palm branches look light and airy, but there is weight in the thick end. Would such a blow be hard enough to kill?

Dixon had to think fast now and keep his wits about him. He wanted to get the job over with and catch a bus back from the beach before the full violence of the storm struck. But the accident to Flinkman must seem plausible.

With satisfaction he noted that a pile of thick timbers leaned against the side of a frame outbuilding behind the house. Driftwood, probably part of an old dock, and to be sawed into firewood most likely. Undoubtedly the wind would blow the timbers down. If Flinkman were found beneath them with a smashed head, who would think of foul play?

The two men went through a small crowded kitchen into the living room of the house. There was a large stone fireplace with a stuffed Silver King tarpon over the mantel. Beside the hearth was a big box filled with fat pine firewood.

Flinkman waved Dixon to a chair, dropped into another himself. Flinkman didn't look like a bank robber. If he had been introduced as a school-teacher or a worker in some research laboratory, Dixon would not have been surprised.

He found it hard to keep his eyes off the man's bald skull. Long and narrow, it had a crease in the top center where the bones joined in the coronal suture. That would be the spot, he thought, where he must strike. One quick smashing blow so Flinkman would die instantly.

First though, he must get the money. And he must not appear too eager or he might scare Flinkman away. This required salesmanship. Dixon felt tense, rigid.

"This is a difficult thing you've asked me to work out for you," he began. He strove to make his tone crisp and businesslike and was delighted to see that he was successful.

Flinkman leaned forward earnestly. His big hands were on his knees and perspiration beaded his bald head. Dixon forced himself not to stare at that head.

"I'm not really a criminal," Flinkman insisted. "All my life, until this—this time, I've been an honest man. I don't know how I ever got mixed up in such a thing. I must have been insane to let Skush and Phil Verzi talk me into it."

**S**UDDENLY he began to weep, bitter tears of self-pity rolling down his hollow cheeks.

"Can't you see, Mr. Dixon, if I wasn't an honest man I wouldn't have asked you to come here."

It was horrible, Dixon thought, watching. Horrible for a man to get himself into such a fix. And horrible, too, that having committed a crime and carried it to a successful conclusion, he should be so lacking in self-confidence as to think of giving up his winnings. To an utter stranger.

He mustn't press Flinkman too far. "An insurance company as big as Mammoth Mutual can sometimes arrange unusual things," he said quietly.

Flinkman came out of his chair then, and grabbed Dixon's arm. His eyes were still streaming.

"That's what I figured," he cried desperately. "That's why I called you, Mr. Dixon. I'm a bookkeeper, not a robber. You've got to help me. Please! All I'm asking is one more chance to go straight!"



That shiny bald skull was right under Dixon's eyes. It fascinated him. He felt an odd sense of detachment.

He was not Jerry Dixon, insurance man. He was an actor playing a part on a stage.

Yet another corner of his brain was feeling pity at the same time. A book-keeper. A white collar hireling beaten down so far by life that he had stopped at nothing in order to get some money. Why, Flinckman was an even more hopeless type than the Mammoth Mutual variety of white collar slave, like himself.

He detached the man's clutching fingers from his sleeve, forcing himself to carry through the act.

"After I talked with you on the phone yesterday," he said, "I was fortunate enough to reach the president of our company. I explained the circumstances briefly to him."

He was thinking, "The president! Why, he doesn't even know I'm on the salary rolls. After fifteen years the president wouldn't know me if I fell dead on his office rug."

He summoned a ring of power and authority to his tone. "If you make full restitution, Flinckman, I think it will be possible for us to call off the law."

Flinckman straightened. He rubbed the back of his big hand roughly across his eyes.

"I have it all except about three hundred dollars." He sounded encouraged, but still doubtful. "I had to use that much for traveling and for renting this out-of-the-way place. But I'll pay that back, too. Every cent of it. If you'll just give me a little time. I'll work."

It was time, Dixon was thinking, to close the sale. Time for the prospect to sign on the dotted line.

Poor fool, to think he could set the calendar back to yesterday. To think it possible to buy back his white collar respectability the way you'd buy merchandise in a store.

"On behalf of the company," he said, "I'll agree to that." His throat felt dry. The words nearly stuck. He got them out. "Give me the money. Then leave everything to me."

That was it. That was asking for the order.

Would the prospect sign? He didn't. Some latent sense of caution made Flinckman hesitate.

"How will I know—" he began in a dubious tone.

Dixon brought his eyebrows together in a heavy frown. There was more than one trick in closing a sale.

If you made the buyer think he was losing his golden opportunity, it often forced the issue.

He got to his feet, seized his briefcase. "I didn't come here to bargain with you, Flinckman. You wanted your chance. We've given it to you. If that isn't enough—"

The trick worked.

"Wait!" Flinckman said. "I'll get the money. Right away."

IT WAS in the kitchen, under a floor board covered with a piece of dirty linoleum.

Flinckman pried the board up with the blade of a screwdriver. The money made a surprisingly small package for such a large sum. Flinckman handed it to Dixon.

With a shock of dismay, Dixon noted that the packet was comprised of thousand-dollar bills. He hadn't counted on that.

It would be harder to explain, when the time came for him to acquire sudden wealth.

He took the money, started to count it. He had to stop. His hands were shaking so he fumbled the bills. He opened his briefcase. Flinckman had gone to the living room window, staring out blindly. Dixon played with the contents of the briefcase. He got the money put away.

It was all over now. He had done the best sales job of his life—and the most remunerative. Only one thing remained. One blow.

With a piece of wood from the bin beside the fireplace. He had figured that detail while he had been talking to Flinckman.

One savage blow across that narrow bald head. He would carry the body to the shed outside and push the leaning timbers down over it, then get out of here. Catch his bus. Put miles between himself and Flinckman's corpse.

## CHAPTER III

## TORTURE



DIXON started across the room. His hands were icy cold now. Cold and yet at the same time sweating. Clammy perspiration. He halted beside the wood bin. "Pick up the stick," he told himself. "This is the opportunity you've waited for all your lifetime. You'll never have another."

He took a heavy billet in his hands. Flinckman's back was still toward him. "He's making it easy for you," part of Dixon's brain was saying. "Go ahead and strike. Get it done!"

He felt numb all over, the way he had felt in the bus. Only worse. It was like paralysis. The doubts and fears in his own mind were robbing him of power to act. He couldn't do this thing! He had thought it would be easy, but it was impossible. He had the white collar mentality. He would always have it.

Slowly he set the stick back in the bin with the other firewood. His opportunity had come. And gone. Because he was too weak to grasp it.

Somewhere outside the house a board fell with a sharp clatter, as the frame building trembled under a stronger gust of wind. Sound of surf on the beach had become a continual roar, like the passing of an endless heavy freight. Even the inside of the closed house was pungent with the stench of rotten seaweed and decaying shells cast up by the tumbling waves.

"I must be losing my mind," Jerry Dixon thought.

He had an overpowering desire to be with Christine, to press her close to him and talk. To unburden his tired mind. Christine wouldn't understand how he could have imagined it possible for him to kill a man. But he hadn't done it, so she wouldn't condemn him. Christine was always comforting in his times of trouble.

In the meantime, there was the problem of Joe Flinckman. The poor devil was a robber, but he wasn't vicious. Dixon knew he wouldn't doublecross the man.

The least he could do, in exchange for the stolen money, was to see that Flinckman got away. He would try to sell the company on calling off the law.

"You'd better come in town with me," he told Flinckman quietly. "The busses will stop running soon. This is too dangerous a place to stay during a hurricane."

Flinckman turned then from the window. In just the few moments he seemed years older.

"Any place is dangerous for me now," he said hopelessly.

Dixon eyed the man sharply. But Flinckman did not suspect how close he had been to death. It was just his natural reaction from mental stress. Dixon knew what that was like.

"Don't be foolish," he began. "You'll have to take care—"

Windows rattled violently with an inrush of air. Both men turned toward the kitchen. In the connecting doorway stood the black-jowled man who had been at the Bickford Hotel last night. He had a flat, deadly automatic in his hand as he stepped into the room.

Right behind him were two other men, the pudgy fat man who had been with Dixon on the bus this morning, and another Dixon had not seen before. He was a swarthy, cocky bantam with a crooked scar on his right cheek. Both were armed. Flinckman was staring at the black-jowled man.

"Skush!" he whispered. His face drained to a pasty gray.

"Hello, doublecrosser," Skush said. "Surprised?"

Flinckman made a meaningless noise deep in his throat.

"You wasn't very smart, Joe," the scar-faced bantam said. "All we had to do was follow this insurance guy from Tampa. Takin' turns so he wouldn't get suspicious."

The fat man's pig eyes rolled in folds of greasy flesh. "Where's the dough, Flinckman?"

Flinckman spread his hands beseechingly. "I haven't got it, Goff. Like I wrote you—"

Sam Goff stepped forward and struck Flinckman across the cheek with his meaty palm.

"Where's that dough?"

"Let him alone," Dixon said.

"Keep out of this, bud, if you want to stay healthy," Skush warned.

Jerry Dixon took a step forward. "You'd better listen to me. This man has—"

"Quiet, I told you!" Skush said.

He swung the muzzle of the big gun, clipping Dixon with it on the side of the head. Dixon felt his knees relax. He dropped into a well of blackness. . . .

A TRAIN was rumbling beneath his body. He could feel his hard bed shake. The squeal of brakes reached his ears. And voices. Angry, excited voices.

He must have had too many drinks with the boys at the sales meeting last night, and this was the morning after. What a head! Jerry Dixon stirred. The train breaks screamed again. They sounded human. As if they were in torment. Strangely, he could smell them, too. A sickening, scorched smell. He tried to sit up in his berth.

"The insurance guy is comin' out of it," a voice near him said.

He was still on the floor of the beach house. The vibration was wind shaking its foundations. His mouth tasted as if painted inside with iodine. Above the drumming of waves outside, the thin screeching sound which had aroused him came again.

Joe Flinkman was making the noise. Flinkman was strapped into a straight-backed chair. His shoes were off. Kneeling in front of the round-shouldered bookkeeper, the small swarthy man was lighting matches, holding them against the sole of Flinkman's bare foot.

"I haven't got the money, Verzi!" Flinkman screamed. "I gave it to the insurance man. Oh-h-h-h! Don't—please don't!"

The fat man, Goff, was watching Dixon.

Skush kept his cold eyes on Verzi and Flinkman.

"Light another," Skush ordered. "He's lying."

Dixon saw the blackened flesh of Flinkman's foot. He gagged.

"Stop it," he said. "That's what I was trying to tell you. He turned the money over to me."

All three hoods gave him their atten-

tion then.

"Yeah?" Skush said. "Where is it then?"

"I hid it," Dixon admitted.

Oddly enough, he was icy calm now. Every vestige of nerves had left him. Never in his life had he felt a higher degree of confidence in himself.

"Get it then," Skush ordered. "Quick!"

Dixon saw his briefcase. Manuals, sales portfolio, personal effects, all the things he had brought with him from the Atlanta meeting were strewn carelessly across the floor where they'd been dumped. He grinned suddenly.

"Find it," he told Skush, "if you can!"

The hood's face darkened with rage. He held his big automatic like a club.

"Why, you—"

Sam Goff had been following Dixon's glance. "Hold it!" he said sharply.

He stepped across to the scattered contents of Dixon's bag. The nickel-plated flashlight Dixon always carried with him when traveling caught his attention. Swiftly he wrenched off the bottom of the tube. Batteries slid out into his pudgy palm. He held the metal cylinder toward the light, peering into the opening. Then angrily he threw it from him.

"Listen, pal," Skush said. "If you're smart, you'll tell us where you put that dough. You saw how we worked on Joe. How'd you like the same treatment?"

Dixon looked him straight in the eye. "How would you like to go to the devil?"

Skush reached down and pulled Dixon to his feet. Then he hit him. Dixon reeled back against the wall. Skush measured him deliberately, planted a solid fist flush on Dixon's mouth.

Dixon fell face downward on the floor again. He could taste the warm, sweet-salt of blood from his battered lips. Then Skush kicked him in the temple and Dixon passed out for the second time. . . .

When his mind began to function next, he knew he must have been out for a long time. Because the bright oblongs of the living room windows had turned a dirty gray. And the swishing sound beneath the floor boards which puzzled him at first would be waves, up now all the way under the beach house.

His puffed and swollen lips pained him; his head throbbed so he could feel it in the pit of his stomach. But he forced himself to lie quietly. As soon as the hoods discovered he had regained consciousness, they would go to work on him again. He dreaded that moment, although he knew it could not be long delayed.

Why, he wondered weakly, should he endure the punishment they were certain to give him? He could no longer hope to profit from recovery of the bank's money. All he could do with it now would be to return it to Mammoth Mutual's claims department. It might keep him hanging a few more months on the company's salary rolls. Was that worth what he should have to endure?

On the other hand, if he told Skush and the others where he had concealed the money, they would not hurt him. They had nothing to fear from him. And he could still keep his own skirts clear with the company by telling how close he had been to recovering the loss, only to be prevented by arrival of the bank robbers.

**J**ERRY DIXON'S teeth clamped together until his jaws ached. No, he'd be blasted if he'd do that! It would mean final, irrevocable failure. He would find himself on the green carpet in every private office at New York, explaining endlessly. There was no such thing in the lexicon of the company as being close to success. Results were what counted. Either you brought home the bacon or you failed.

The hoods were all at the other end of the living room. They had lighted a fire on the hearth and dug up a whisky bottle from somewhere.

A note of fear quavered in Sam Goff's voice. "I don't like this wind, Skush. Water's all the way back to the road already. They say it'll be worse. You heard 'em on the radio. We oughta get out of here."

"Do you think I like it?" Skush spoke savagely. He got up, took an iron poker, stirred the blazing logs. He added another stick from the woodbin. "But we can't leave here yet, you fool. This insurance man's stashed the dough somewhere around here. Do you want to walk

off and leave it?"

"No," Goff said, "but we could take the insurance guy and Joe with us. We could work on 'em later."

Skush flipped the light switch and the room was brilliant again. "Too big a chance," he said positively. "We can't just go riding around in this storm with two guys tied up in the car. We gotta wait."

Suddenly he crossed to where Dixon lay. Viciously he struck Dixon across the face.

"Wake up!" he yelled. "Snap out of it, curse you!"

Black waves of pain beat against Dixon's throbbing head. He could feel his stomach knot with the effort of repressing a groan. He kept his eyes tightly shut. Skush slapped him again. The man was cursing in a black rage.

"That's what you get for hitting him so hard," Flinkman said.

Feet scuffled swiftly on floor boards. Dixon risked a look through slitted eyes. He saw the black-jowled gangster tower above Flinkman, pinioned in the chair.

"It was you that got us in this mess!" Skush yelled. "Dirty, doublecrossing—"

The overhead light glinted on the barrel of the big automatic as it swung down. Right on that crease in the helpless man's bald skull. Flinkman grunted once explosively. There was a sound like the snapping of a dry, rotten board.

Flinkman's skull was no longer shiny. But Skush in his fury struck a second time and a third. The man in the chair sagged forward limply against the ropes holding him.

Dixon retched. He couldn't help it. His hand had once been poised to produce that same red horror. Only he would have struck in cold premeditation, instead of in blind fury. He was worse than Skush.

No. It wasn't true! The man who had planned to kill was not Jerry Dixon. It had been a sick man, a man whose mind had been faint with frustration and despair. That man was here no longer. Skush was towering over him.

"So you're back with us, pal," the crook snarled. "That's fine. Tell us where you hid our dough and we'll give you fifty grand for yourself."

"Not enough," Dixon said. "I need the whole two hundred thousand. To repay the loss my company stood."

Verzi spoke from the other side of the room. He had the snipe of a black cigar screwed into his teeth.

"Get wise to yourself, buddy. Your insurance company is filthy rich. They don't need it."

A gust shook the house until it strained against its foundations. An ominous new whistling note rose above the beat of angry waves.

Sam Goff was sweating. "It's dangerous here. Come on, fellow, tell us where the dough is and then let's all get out of here."

A window blind tore loose somewhere upstairs. They could hear it fly into splinters against a tree trunk.

"I'm not going to talk," Jerry Dixon said flatly.

Goff touched Skush on the arm. "Let's take him with us," he implored. "We'll have plenty time to make him talk. This whole house feels like it's going to blow away."

Skush hesitated. Then, "Okay," he capitulated, "you and Phil Verzi go bring the car around. I'll get the ropes off Joe and use them on this insurance guy."

## CHAPTER IV

### WITH THE HELP OF NATURE



VERZI and Goff disappeared into the kitchen. Wind swirled through the room as they got the door open. One of the living room windows let go with a crash of splintering glass. Smoke and ashes from the fireplace eddied out.

Skush was cursing in a level, deadly monotone. He knelt beside the man he had killed, fumbling with the knotted ropes. He took care to keep one eye always on Dixon.

Suddenly the electric lights went black. Jerry Dixon knew that somewhere a falling tree had carried away the power lines. He knew something else. That his chances for life were slim indeed. If he once left that house he would probably be unable to recover the stolen

bank money, even if Skush and the others tortured him to the point of death.

He started to inch across the floor toward Skush. The man had turned so the dim light of the dying fire would help him untangle the ropes from Flinkman.

"If I can only reach the woodbox!" Jerry Dixon said to himself. "If I can get my hands on one of those sticks!"

Skush saw him before he was halfway across the floor. Skush had the gun in his hand and it cut loose with a sudden bellow, flame lancing through the darkness of the room.

But Skush still wanted Dixon alive, so he could learn the secret of where those thousand dollar bills were hidden. Instead of shooting to kill, he aimed for Dixon's legs.

Dixon didn't feel pain. Only swift numbness in his right leg. As he started to fall, he tried to reach the woodbox. But Skush hit him first.

The weight of the man's hard body drove him to the very edge of the fireplace. In the act of falling, his hand clutched the handle of the poker beside the hearth. An ember flared, just long enough to show him the bank robber's face, snarling like a wild beast. Skush had the gun clubbed now, for the finish.

Jerry Dixon swung the iron poker with all his strength. He knew he was killing a man. But this was different. This was killing to protect his own life and his firm's money. This was justifiable. It wasn't murder. Skush yelled and staggered back. His gun struck against the floor. The thud of his fall was muffled by a surge of water beneath the house.

Dixon was on the floor too. He crawled after Skush. He got the gun. Then he went after his briefcase and its scattered contents. He was stuffing the sales material into the bag when he heard Goff and Verzi at the kitchen door.

Quietly he dragged himself toward the stairs. The back door burst open with another inrush of wind. Glass fragments tinkled from the broken window.

"We can't start the crate!" Verzi was yelling as he got the door shut. "Water's up so high it's got in our gas line,

"Skush." The note of alarm grew sharper. "Skush, where are you?"

Still clinging to the gun and the briefcase, Dixon managed to pull himself to the head of the stairs. He could hear Goff and Verzi below. Explosive exclamations told when they found their battered partner.

He saw the flashlight beam following the trail his wounded leg had left across the floor. Lying flat on his stomach, he squeezed the trigger of the big automatic when the light was halfway up the stairs. He didn't hit the light, but it went out abruptly and he heard the two men scrambling to safety.

He wondered how many shells were left in the magazine. So long as they lasted he had temporary mastery of the situation. But he couldn't waste them. It wasn't likely, he thought, that the hoods would try to rush him at such point-blank range. Still, it had now become a case of their lives or his own.

He lay in utter blackness, listening. Maybe there were other stairs. Back stairs. His ears strained. But he heard nothing except the thin whistling of the wind and the waves beating now against the bottom of the house. His leg was beginning to pain him. In the utter darkness he tore a strip from his shirt, tied it tightly above the wound.

Time passed. Endless time, it seemed to Dixon. Waves beat hammer blows against the front of the house. It seemed at each gust as if the wind would pick up the building and carry it bodily away. Finally, a crash of timbers and yells from the two men below told that something had let go.

**T**HE flashlight was on again and Dixon could see water in the dark pit which was the stair well. Plucked by the wind, Sam Goff's voice floated up.

"You, up there! Listen!"

"I hear you," Dixon said.

"Let us come up," Goff implored. "We won't hurt you."

"You can say that again," Dixon called back. "But don't come near these stairs. If you do, I'll nail you!"

"The whole front of the house is caved," Goff yelled. "We'll drown."

"That," Dixon replied, "would be tough."

"But you can't—"

Dixon didn't waste his strength in further argument. He didn't have it to waste. He felt as if he might pass out any minute. And he knew that when Goff and Verzi became sufficiently desperate, they would rush him. He would have to be alert when that happened. Grimly he fought down his weakness.

Even so, he must have fallen into a partial stupor. As if from a vast distance he could hear the men splashing around below. And behind him, in the bedrooms, window panes burst occasionally under the relentless pressure of the wind swirling through the house.

Some innate protective sense aroused him finally. They were coming, and he knew it. Although the wind died between gusts just at that moment and there wasn't a sound but the gurgle of water running out through chinks in the house. But they were on the stairs, creeping toward him. He was positive.

His finger tensed on the trigger of the gun. Like the instantaneous fall of a camera shutter, the spurt of flame etched dark shapes almost at the top of the steps. They fell back into darkness.

Then a great comber struck the house. It swept through the wrecked living room below.

The flashlight came on once more below, but only long enough to show Dixon an empty hole where the stairs had been. It was a hole filled with black churning water and splintered wood.

"I'm drowning!" Sam Goff yelled in sheerest terror. "Help me—help!"

The light went off then for good. And Jerry Dixon passed out cold, as much alone as if he were on a raft in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. . . .

Next thing he knew he wasn't alone. He was in bed. In a clean, bare room. With Christine sitting near him. And a neatly-dressed, youngish man with sharp hatchet features and intense restless eyes was there. Jerry Dixon shut his eyes, opened them. It wasn't a dream. The man was Bill Diamond.

"He's coming out of it," Diamond said.

"Oh, thank God!" Christine put her head down on Jerry's chest and began to cry quietly. He raised a weak hand,



laid it on her soft hair.

"Where am I?" he asked Diamond.  
"How did you get here?"

Diamond smiled. "You're at the hospital in Fort Marsden. I flew down from Home Office when I heard."

The Vice-President and General Sales Manager went on to give details. A searching party, visiting the beach, immediately after the hurricane passed, had found Dixon. The bottom part of the house was gone, all but a few uprights which supported a portion of the second floor like a pelican's nest in a mangrove tree. Jerry Dixon was lying there in plain view, like the egg in the nest. He had taken a blow over the head from a falling board. The doctor said he would be all right.

"How about Verzi?" Dixon asked.  
"And Sam Goff?"

Diamond didn't know what he was talking about. There had been people killed during the storm, yes. In the worst part of that night, water had covered the whole island of Fort Marsden Beach to a depth of seven feet.

Bodies had been recovered at the far side of the island. One was a tall man with his head bashed in, evidently from a falling beam. In fact, two men had been killed in that manner. Then there was a small, swarthy man who had drowned. Strangers, all three of them.

It came to Jerry Dixon suddenly that Diamond knew nothing about the bank robbers or the recovered funds.

"Why did you fly down?" he asked.

"You're one of our valuable men, Jerry. I wanted to be sure you got the very best attention."

**V**ALUABLE man! Dixon wondered how long he could hang on the payroll now if he were incapacitated with a bum leg.

He wondered about Sam Goff. The fat man had stopped a bullet. Maybe his carcass was floating way out in the Gulf. Maybe it was caught in the roots of the mangrove swamp between the beach and the mainland. Probably, by the time it was found, if it ever were, the bullet wound would be obliterated.

He could explain his own wounded leg with some tall tale of being held up and robbed. He still had his chance to keep

the bank loot for himself. He wouldn't even have to kill anyone.

"Did they find my briefcase?" he asked anxiously.

"Don't worry about such things now, dear," Christine said.

"Did they find it?" he insisted.

"Yes, dear. I have it."

"Get it, please."

Dixon took out the new sales portfolio. He pulled the printed exhibits from their celluloid windows. Sandwiched between the sheets were half a dozen thousand-dollar bills. There were more in the next page. And still more. A total of two hundred in all.

He handed them to Bill Diamond.

"The Jackson City Bank loot," he said.

He went on then to tell all that had happened—all except the impulse to murder which had come to him on the train from Tampa. Since he had resisted that impulse, the secret was his.

Diamond smiled. "That's a grand job, Jerry. And it's going to start you with a bang in your new position."

"New position?"

Diamond's sharp features relaxed into a friendly grin. "Sure. I tried to call you from New York to tell you. Our Claims Department is being completely revamped."

"What's that got to do with me?" Dixon asked faintly. "I'm not in claims."

"That's just the trouble," Diamond said. "I should have seen it before. After our conversation at the meeting, I realized that I was at fault, not you. In checking your past record with the company I discovered your talent is along the line of claims work. That's where you belong, Jerry. So I did a sales job for you on the Claims Vice-President."

"You did!" Dixon was amazed. He hadn't thought he rated that much interest among the company Brass Hats.

Diamond's jaw thrust out aggressively. "They told me I was a salesman and should stick to my own department. But I sold my bill of goods." He chuckled. The man was fairly bubbling with self-confidence. "I never did a better job. Wait until they hear what you've accomplished! They'll have to admit that my suggestion for our new Assistant General Claims Manager is a natural."



Buddy hurtled into the thief, and the burned beam did the rest

# NO DELAY, NO REST

By DAVID X. MANNERS

*Buddy wanted to follow in his policeman dad's footsteps—  
but he didn't realize how quickly they'd lead to a killer!*

**L**ITTLE "Buddy" Dell's ears perked up as the midget radio in his room hit the thousand-cycle note. The thousand-cycle note is the high-pitched tone that always comes on as an attention-calling prelude to a police call. Buddy closed the detective story magazine he was reading, keeping a chubby finger between the pages to mark his place.

"Cars Nine-eighteen and Eight-seventy-two," the call began.

Buddy stiffened and let the detective magazine drop. Car 918 was his daddy's car, and only once before in his twelve-year-old life had he heard it paged on the radio.

"The address is One-forty-two Bleecker Street," the call continued. "Signal thirty—"

Little Buddy didn't hear any more than that. A cold shiver had started at the base of his spine and spread upward to stiffen his scalp and scatter goose bumps over his arms. Signal 30, he knew very well, meant a serious crime had been committed or was being committed, and the officers called were to proceed to the location given and take necessary action!

Buddy's heart hit a rapid, thr-u-umping pace. And Bleecker Street was right in the neighborhood—less than three blocks away!

*Tap, tap, tap* went footsteps in the next room, and Buddy knew his mother was near. "Buddy-y-y!"

Quickly he snapped off the radio. He was forbidden to listen to police calls. The only

reason a set wired for the calls was in his room was because radios were scarce and one wired like that had been the only kind available.

Buddy's dad, of course, had seen to it that the police-wave part of it had been disconnected, but Buddy had long ago discovered the way to attach it up again. When he got big, he wanted to be a radio patrolman just like his dad, Sergeant Bernard Dell, and what better training was there than listening to police calls?

"Buddy-y-y!" rang his mother's voice again, and Buddy grimaced.

He turned and there she was in the doorway.

Mrs. Dell was slender and blond and young, and Buddy had often thought that she was the most beautiful mother in the world. He didn't wonder his dad loved her so much.

"Buddy, are you going to the grocery and get that sugar like I told you?" she asked. "It's getting late. The store will be closed soon."

"Yessum," said Buddy.

Darting for his cap which lay on the bed, he snatched it up and raced by his mother toward the door.

"Buddy!" the call came after him. "Aren't you going to put on your coat? It's freezing out. Whatever's got into you?"

"Oh, awrl-1-ght."

**R**ELUCTANTLY he waited while she brought the coat and bundled him into it. He couldn't tell her, though he was busting with it, that his dad's car had just been called on the radio and that dad had been sent on a dangerous order, chasing crooks, right in the neighborhood.

If he did, she would know he had been listening to police calls again. And what was more awful, she probably would not even let him go out of the house now, thinking he would chase down to where the excitement was.

That last time he had run all the way down to Canal Street, getting there too late to see what was going on, and ending up getting lost and picked up and brought home by the police. It had been the biggest thrill in his life, riding in a squad car, even if he had been scared almost out of his breeches.

But he wouldn't get lost this time. Why, Bleeker Street—he knew it as well as he knew the freckles on his face!

"Now, Buddy, remember what I said to

get," his mother warned him, getting at the top button on his coat. "Five pounds of sugar. You tell the grocer it's for Mrs. Dell, and he'll know. And here's the money, and the ration stamp. Be sure and don't lose it. Especially the stamp."

Buddy took the stamp and the money, scampered down the stairs, and out of the brownstone. It was dark outside, and thin lamplight lay on the walk and street. It got dark early, in December.

Buddy made a beeline for the grocery, keeping his head down, as if that would help shut out the thoughts singing in his mind. All his life he had been interested in law enforcement and fighting crooks. He was a Junior G-man and had a little green card to prove it, an impressive card with a seal and serial number stamped in red. And now a real crime was being crushed out right in the neighborhood—by his own daddy—and he couldn't be on hand to see it.

Buddy stopped on the Avenue of the Americas and looked down toward Bleeker Street. Traffic, hurrying in both directions, choked the thoroughfare. It would take him only three or four minutes to run down to Bleeker Street, he decided. He could get back and home without his mother knowing.

But he would have to get the sugar first. If he didn't, by the time he got back the grocer might be closed, and he wouldn't have the sugar—and his disobedience would be revealed.

And it was a disobedience. Buddy thought about that even after he had the big brown bag of precious sugar safely in his arms and was looking toward Bleeker Street again, only two blocks away now. He had no business going there. If he went, he would just have to look to see if Dad was there, and maybe wave to him, and then Dad would know he must have disobeyed. And there might be shooting, and crooks running off with money.

Buddy's little legs started pumping with the thought. A real, honest-to-Joe robbery and real, live crooks such as he had only read about—that was what was happening. He might get to see them even.

The sugar bag was heavy, the going underfoot slippery and uncertain. Buddy's sharp fingernails dug into the palm of his clenched right fist as he raced.

"*Nec mora, nec requies*," the motto on his G-men card said, and Buddy had memorized it. His dad had told him it meant that where

fighting crooks was concerned there could be no delay and no rest.

A siren whined, not so far off, and then another, even closer, and Buddy knew that not only his daddy's and the one other car mentioned in the police call were answering the alarm, but every car anywhere close. That's the way it was on all "30" calls.

A police car, its red light blinking, scooted past. Buddy skirted to avoid a pile of Christmas trees stacked near the curb, and cut across the street to take the shortcut down Cornelia Street to Bleecker. Panting, head down, legs pumping, he whirled around the corner.

And—*wha-a-m*—he ran smack into a man who was just whirling around the corner from the opposite direction!

The man's legs went out from under him and his arms windmilled wildly as he tried to keep from going down. But down he went, and Buddy on top of him, in a tangle of arms and legs, and dropped belongings.

**B**UDDY scrambled up, going for the precious sack of sugar. Then the man was up, snatching for a bulging black bag that he carried and which, when it hit the walk, had spilled.

Buddy's eyes mooned, staring. The man spoke a swear word. Buddy wasn't sure which he saw first, the man's terrible, angry, bony face and its hot, murderous eyes or, littering the walk from the broken-open bag, the just awful lot of green money!

Buddy was immobile where he stood, unable to help the man rake up his dropped money, unable to say he was sorry he had bumped into him, unable to go on—unable hardly to breathe.

All he could do was gape at the man cramming the money back in the bag, and think that here was the real, live crook the police had sent his dad after, and whom, only a few short minutes ago, he had been hopping, so crazy-mad, to see.

Buddy had no time even for that then. The crook's free arm had circled him, and a cold, damp, bony hand had slapped stinging over his mouth. Buddy felt himself being dragged backward into the doorway of an untenanted store.

Buddy was numb all over.

"So yuh know who I am?" The man's breath hissed down at him. "Well, that's just too bad. Now I can't let yuh go, spreadin' an alarm."

Buddy thought his heart had stopped beating now too. He had been crazy, coming down here where a crook was. Now, unless somebody hurried, the crook would kill him, maybe break his neck by a violent twist of that cold, bony hand. And if he kicked the man's shins, it would probably make him kill him quicker.

Buddy tried to struggle, but he couldn't. The man was too big, and holding him in too strong a grip.

"*Nec mora, nec requies*"—the motto on his G-men card raced through Buddy's mind and formed on his clamped lips. He couldn't afford to delay, he realized, hoping his dad or someone grown came to rescue him. No, he couldn't wait for that.

Buddy's fingers dug down into his coat pocket. He would have to find some way, some means to hurt this crook and make him let go a minute. Just long enough maybe so he could get away. His fingers felt the smooth hardness of a lead pencil. It had a sharp point. But what good would a dinky pencil be against a crook's hard hide?

Buddy's fingers moved past the slit at his coat pocket, reached through to his jacket underneath, and then he found something else.

"Quit squirming, will yuh?" the man snarled right then. "Yuh're not gettin' away! I'm takin' yuh with me!"

But Buddy didn't have to squirm any more. His plan was already worked out in his mind, clear as glass. He needed only one slight break to make it good, and a moment later he got it when the crook kned him out of the doorway onto the walk, took the hand away from his mouth, and grabbed him roughly by the arm.

"Now don't try to yell out, or get away, or I'll shoot yuh dead," the thief said. "We're headin' for that buildin' across the street."

Buddy gave one glance and he saw it was the wrecked hulk of a building that had gone up in a spectacular fire only three weeks before. A glance at the Avenue and he saw that a squad car had already pulled up there at the corner. A cordon had probably been thrown around the whole neighborhood.

Buddy had planned to use the pencil to jab a hole in the sack of sugar. There was no other way. Maybe somebody would see the trail of sugar he left behind, leading to wherever the crook was taking him, and if they recognized it was sugar, maybe they

would figure the place it led to must be pretty important, for anybody to leave such a valuable trail leading to it.

But a bony hand grabbing Buddy's arm prevented the use of the pencil. Gritting his teeth, Buddy thrust his sharp thumbnail at the brown paper bag instead. Immediately, he felt the spilling grains of sugar across his skin. It was more of a hole than he intended. He had figured on only a scant trail so the crook wouldn't notice it. But the way the sugar was spouting out, the crook would likely see it, and if he didn't, all the sugar might be gone anyway before it would do any good.

The man hurried across the narrow street. Boards had been nailed across the entrance to the fire-gutted building, but already neighborhood kids had kicked enough loose so that it was possible to duck inside the desolate wreck. If it was dark out on dimly-lit Cornelia Street, it was triple dark inside.

THE thief thumbed alight a flashlight whose lens had all been blacked out save a narrow strip, and the thin beam found a littered staircase. The place reeked of water-soaked, charred wood and dead air. When they reached the stairway, the last of the sugar spilled from Buddy's bag, but he didn't let the empty paper fall until they were started upward.

At the top of the stairs, the man stopped, snapped off the flash abruptly, and Buddy could sense that he had turned his hot eyes backward, looking down the stair-well. There was the beat of pounding feet along the street. The steps slowed, grated to a stop at the boarded-up entranceway. A moment's silence, and then there was the sound of a board being ripped away.

The thief spoke another swear word.

"They've found us," he said, and thrust Buddy toward and through a door opening off the rubbish-strewn hall.

Windows were gone inside, and part of the wall had caved away, making the room light enough to see the char-quilted boards and half-burned ceiling beams that had dropped down, angling crazily from the floor.

The thief thrust the door shut, put down his laden bag. For the first time he unlimbered his gun which Buddy knew was an automatic.

"They'll hand me twenty years for heistin' that check-cashin' joint," he muttered. "But

nine hot slugs say they don't take me."

Footsteps, growing from unreality into distinctness, were now moving up the stairs. Again, a cold chill started at the bottom of Buddy's back, like the one he had felt when he had first heard the call signalling "30" for his dad. The chill spread up his shoulders and made the short hairs on his neck rise stiffly, as if they were coming to life.

He knew it—he just knew it. His dad was leading the way up those stairs, and—and—

Buddy looked at the meaningful thrust of the automatic, and there just wasn't enough air to breathe.

"Open up and come out—in the name of the Law!" came the sudden challenge from the hallway, and now Buddy had no doubt at all about its being his dad.

He wanted to shout out that he was in there, but he knew the last thing he should let this crook know was that the policeman out there was his father. And, anyway, surely there was no need to tell that to his dad.

"Come and get me, copper!" the thief's answer was flung out defiantly.

Then Buddy went into action with startling speed. He saw the chance, and he took it before he could think. All he knew was that this crook must never get a chance to shoot that gun.

A cry choked from Buddy's throat. The crook flashed a look at him.

"They're coming from the window!" Buddy gasped.

The thief turned to look. Head down, arms out, Buddy thrust forward, pumping, plummeting, his small body hurtling into the thief just above the knees. An angling ceiling beam which Buddy had seen behind the man did the rest. Over it the crook toppled, his gun going off wildly at the darkness above him.

Buddy flung open the door.

"In here!" he cried. "He's fallen on the floor—over there!"

And then, quickly, it was over, with the thief handcuffed and quieted, and Buddy sobbing with relief, burying his face against his dad's long blue overcoat.

The radio patrolman ruffled his youngster's already tousled head.

"It was nice work, sprout," he said, "the way you let us know you were hid out in this building."

"He—he let yuh know he was in here?" the thief muttered, uncomprehending.

(Concluded on page 111)

Fury in his brain, Marty twisted free and hung a right cross solidly on Big Ed's mouth



# DEAD MAN OVERHEAD

By HAL K. WELLS

*Marty Glidden believed one stretch in the Big House enough, but found it hard to convince his old-time criminal buddies!*

IT WASN'T much of a filling station—merely a badly rundown affair on a side street in a grimy industrial district—but Marty Glidden surveyed it with the proprietary pride of a young father surveying his first offspring. After all, a guy fresh out on parole after two years in stir couldn't expect too much. Marty had been lucky to get this.

The fresh paint that he had spent the

afternoon daubing around had worked wonders in freshening the place up. Plenty of hard work, plus Marty's natural mechanical bent, could do the rest. True, there were at least two rather ticklish complications that would probably develop as soon as certain parties found out what he was doing. But Marty had figured on those hazards and was ready to meet them.



It was seven-thirty and the evening fog was beginning to drift in from the Pacific a dozen miles away when the first of the complications arrived. A large sedan pulled into the station and "Big Ed" Barlo climbed down from behind the wheel.

Big Ed was as opulently overstuffed and glossily arrogant as the gleaming sedan he drove. His gross body towered half a foot above Marty's bantam-sized five foot seven.

"Hi, Marty!" he boomed jovially. "The boys told me you were back. Why didn't you come around and look your old pals up?"

"I got no old pals to look up," said Marty.

The bulbous eyes beneath Big Ed's swarthy brows hardened.

"What kind of talk is that?" he demanded. "I know you caught a stiff rap on that truck stick-up a couple of years ago, but didn't I give you the best mouthpiece in town and go to bat for you every other way? You got no business being sore at me, Marty."

"I'm not sore," Marty said. "I'm just through."

"Forget it, kid!" said Big Ed. "You're just a little stir-shy. Everybody is when they first get out. You won't hit a tough rap like that again. We're in the big dough now. And it's nice, easy, safe dough."

"Yeh, I know," Marty answered. "Hot cars, black markets, hijacking, and what have you. I read the papers. I also read that Judge Arden Miller's committee is beginning to get pretty hot on your tail."

"Still got Judge Miller on your mind, huh?" Big Ed said. "I remember the day he sent you up you jumped up in his court and promised you'd get him if it was the last thing you ever did."

Marty flushed. "Skip it. I got better sense now."

**H**EAVY lids drooped low over Big Ed's bulging eyes.

"Don't worry about Judge Miller, kid. We'll take care of him. And don't worry about what's in the papers. They got nothing on us. You got a spot here we can use. You play along with us, and you'll be sitting pretty. How about it?"

"Listen, Ed," Marty said tautly. "Any dumb, wild kid like I was has a right to make one mistake. Okay, I made it, and I paid for it. A guy that makes the same mistake twice is a dope. Like I told you, I'm through. Now take your easy dough and your rackets and get off my place, and stay off!"

Anger purpled Big Ed's heavy-jowled face. His hand grabbed Marty's shirt.

"Why, you sniveling, yellow little punk!" he snarled.

Red fury flared in Marty's brain. He twisted free and hung a right cross solidly on Big Ed's mouth. Big Ed staggered backward, then caught himself. Hate swam black and naked in his bulbous eyes as he stared at Marty.

"So you think you're through, do you?" His softly purring voice was more menacing than any snarl could have been. "You're not through, punk. You're just starting!"

He climbed into the sedan and gunned it out of the driveway. Marty grinned as he watched him go. He turned to meet another car coming in, and the grin vanished.

The second complication had arrived, and at a singularly inopportune time. The car was a police cruiser. The man who got out of it was Detective-sergeant Mike Dunlavy, the dick who had taken Marty in two years ago.

Dunlavy was as tall as Big Ed Barlo, but there was little fat on his powerful frame.

His face was bleakly hostile as he confronted Marty.

"Didn't take you long to get back in with the old mob, did it?" he commented. "Or maybe you'll try to tell me that wasn't Big Ed Barlo who just left."

"It was Big Ed," Marty admitted. "But I'm not back with his mob. Or any other mob. This station I've got is strictly legit, and I'm keeping it that way."

"My, my!" Dunlavy jeered. "So you're one of those lovely reformed characters now. You've been a bad boy, but up at the Big House you learned your lesson."

"I learned some things up there, yes," said Marty evenly.

Dunlavy's bull-dog face hardened. He stepped close, crowding Marty against the wall of the station.

"Who do you think you're kidding?" he spat contemptuously. "You're not breaking your back trying to build up this rundown joint. That would be sucker stuff to a wise guy like you. Maybe your parole officer fell for it, but I don't. This spot could be too handy for Big Ed's rackets."

Dunlavy's hand shoved Marty hard against the wall. One of his big shoes trod solidly on Marty's toes. It was the old shoveroo—push you around and rough you up till you lost your head and took a sock at your tormentor.

That broke your parole and you went back to the dreary world behind the gray walls.

It was a good trick, but Marty wasn't having any. He set his jaw and took all that Dunlavy handed him. Dunlavy finally stepped back with a snort of disgust.

"Not so tough now, huh?" he taunted. "Not the same bad, bad cooky who stood up in Judge Miller's court and shot off his mouth about how he'd fix the Judge as soon as he got out."

Dunlavy walked over to his car, then stopped for a final word.

"I'll be seeing you, Marty. Yeh, I'll be seeing you early, late, and often. The first stunt you try to pull, I'll slap you right back in stir where you belong."

Marty's face was grim as he watched the cruiser glide away through the thin gray fog. He knew Mike Dunlavy well enough to know just what he was in for. Dunlavy wouldn't try to frame him or anything like that. Mike was straight enough, but he belonged to that breed of cops who believed that once a con always a con.

From here on, he would be on Marty's tail day and night.

Marty squared his shoulders. Okay, he could take it. And he could take anything that Big Ed's muscle boys tried to dish out. He had lain awake too many nights up there staring with sleepless eyes into the steel-barred shadows while his aching brain tried to sort things out. He had them sorted out now into a new and satisfying set of values, and it would take more than a blustering mobster and a parolee-riding cop to mess his life up for him again.

TWENTY minutes went by without a customer. Then a big, old model coupé drove in, and Marty stared bug-eyed at the gray-haired, black-clad man who got out.

"Hello, Marty. It's good to see you."

Marty didn't quite know how it happened, but he found himself shaking hands. Judge Arden Miller looked around him.

"Nice place you've got, Marty. With a little work on it, you'll really have something. How late are you open tonight?"

"Until about ten."

"Fine. Could you fix me up on a general lubrication job?"

"Sure," Marty said. "Be glad to."

"I know it's pretty late for that sort of work," Miller said apologetically, "but I never seem to find time during the day. I have a meeting near here tonight, and I thought I could leave the car and pick it up on my way back."

"It'll be ready," Marty said. "Want me to call you a taxi?"

"No, I can catch a bus at the corner of Kurtz. It's only three blocks and the walk will do me good. What time will the car be ready?"

"Any time after an hour from now. And, Judge—" Marty hesitated. When a guy had never made an apology to anyone in his life, it was a little hard to figure how to go about it. "That day I was up before you in court—the things I . . . You know, the way I shot off my face. Well, I—"

Laugh wrinkles crinkled the corners of Miller's eyes. "Funny thing about my memory, Marty. I must be getting old. I don't seem to remember a thing about that day in court."

Marty drew a deep breath. "Thanks, Judge," he said. He suddenly wanted to shake hands with Miller again, and he did. There was something about the clasp that brought a warm glow to Marty's heart.

The warmth was still there as he drove the coupé back to the open air lube-rack near the rear board fence of the station lot. The rack was not equipped for night work, but with a flashlight he could manage. After Miller had gone so far out of his way to make a decent and friendly gesture, Marty

would have done the job if he had to do it by the light of matches.

He started the hydraulic hoist and watched the coupé rise. Half-way up there was a sudden rustling as a drooping limb tip of a nearby pepper tree caught in the rear bumper and stayed there as the car rose. Marty made a mental note to add a little pruning to tomorrow's list of chores.

The car reached the top of the lift. He went under it and started work. He had been at it for a quarter of an hour when a horn blasted from the station pumps. He snapped off his light and went to wait on the customer.

The car was a lemon-colored convertible. The girl behind the wheel had hair that was three shades yellower than the car. The face beneath the hair might have been called gorgeous if you cared for that spectacular variety of paint job. Marty didn't.

"Hullo there, small, red-headed, and cute," the blonde said. There was something about her face that struck a faint note somewhere in Marty's memory, but he couldn't quite place it. "I got trouble," she announced plaintively. "Engine trouble. Listen."

She stepped on the accelerator. Marty listened briefly to the smoothly racing motor.

"Sounds all right to me," he said.

"But it isn't all right," she protested. "There's a funny sort of noise. Like something is too loose. Or too tight. Or too something. Can't you at least take a look at it?"

Marty shrugged his shoulders, and threw the hood back. For ten minutes he prowled the motor from fan-belt to timer, while the blonde alternately raced the engine and offered suggestions that struck an all-time high in mechanical stupidity. Marty finally slammed the hood down.

"Lady, there's nothing whatever wrong with that motor," he announced flatly.

A car horn sounded two short blasts from the intersection behind him. The blonde glanced at her wrist-watch.

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "I must've just imagined it. But I do need

[Turn page]

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some gas. And some oil. And maybe you'd better check the air and the water."

MARTY managed to get two gallons into the tank, though it was nearly full. There was no possible need for any oil. The tires were at correct pressure. The radiator was full.

The blonde looked at her watch again, then handed Marty a dollar bill.

"Thanks a lot, little pal," she said. "You've no idea what a help you've been."

Marty stared at the vanishing rear of the convertible with mixed emotions. There was something about the incident that didn't make sense. Then he shook his head and gave it up. Trying to make sense out of the actions of that dizzy variety of blonde was a waste of any man's time. He went back to the lube-rack.

Before starting work, he glanced casually up at the darkly looming car—and abruptly froze in stark amazement. It was dark around the rack, but not too dark to see that the coupé was no longer empty. A man's body sat stiffly behind the wheel, his face a featureless blur in the gloom!

Marty's flashlight stabbed upward. His breath caught in a strangled gasp. The man sitting in the coupé, with unwinking eyes staring from a blood-streaked face, was Judge Arden Miller!

Marty snatched the hoist lever. The car started down. There was a rustle as the pepper tree branch tore free from the bumper.

He had the car door open before the tires touched the ground. Then he saw that there was no need for haste as far as Judge Miller was concerned. Miller was dead. His left temple had been caved in as though by a blow from a heavily loaded blackjack.

Marty stared at the dead face for a long moment while memory of his violent outburst in Miller's court two years ago echoed in his ears like a mocking voice of doom. He had threatened to kill Miller the moment he was released from stir. And now Miller was dead, his body propped behind the wheel of his car here in Marty's filling station.

What possible story could he tell the

cops? That Judge Miller's body had mysteriously appeared behind the wheel of a car that rested on a raised lube-rack well over five feet from the ground? Marty's lips curled. He could imagine the derisive laughter that yarn would bring.

He grimly fought back the panic-stricken paralysis that threatened to numb his shocked brain. This was no time to go off the deep end. The thing to do now was to think straight—and fast.

He had little to start on. The fact that the pepper tree branch had still been tangled in the bumper when he lowered the car indicated that the rack had not been lowered during his absence. That meant that Miller's body had been placed in the car while it was still at the top of the hoist. But how had the body been brought there?

The only way to get from the street to the lube-rack was past the station office within a dozen feet of where Marty had been working on the blonde's car. No one could possibly have come that way without being seen. That left only one other possibility.

He went around to the other side of the car. There was a board fence along the back line of the station lot, half a dozen feet from the lube-rack. The car's left door was toward the fence and parallel with it.

He played his flashlight over the fence. It was darkly green with fresh paint that he had applied late that afternoon, but the paint on the wide faces of the boards was undisturbed. Marty shook his head wearily. He seemed to be getting nowhere fast.

Then a sudden thought struck him. He swiftly checked heights and distances. The top of the fence lacked only about four inches of being level with the coupé's running-board when the car was at the top of the hoist. Marty dragged a box over to the fence and stepped up on it.

There was a narrow brick alleyway on the other side, running between the fence and the blank wall of a loft building. The alley side of the fence was unpainted, but the tops of the half-inch thick boards had been painted. There was a definitely smudged space a foot

wide in the fresh paint on the fence top. Marty stepped down from the box. He knew now how Miller's body had been placed in the coupé. The only remaining problem was who had placed it there. Marty thought of Big Ed Barlo. Then he snapped his fingers as thought of Big Ed jogged a dormant memory to life. "Mae Doran!" he exclaimed.

**S**URE that was the blonde's name. There had been a picture of her in the papers. The most recent in Big Ed's long list of girl friends, she had been hauled in for questioning by Miller's committee.

Marty started toward the office, then stopped. Miller's coupé would attract little attention in the shadows, but there was a chance that the lights of a car in the street might spotlight the dead man sitting behind the wheel. Marty gently placed Miller's body in a reclining position on the seat. Then he went to a bench, selected a quart can from among several, and took it into the office.

He opened an old steel safe, left by a previous tenant, and placed the can inside. It was an odd sort of a thing to be locking away like some rare jewel, but for the moment that can was more valuable than any jewel. It could easily mean the difference between life and a trip to the gas-chamber.

He turned out the lights, locked the door, and started toward his jalopy, then stopped abruptly. There was a police cruiser parked at the curb.

Mike Dunlavy stepped out from behind the gas pumps.

"Yeh, I'm back, Junior," he commented sardonically. "Going somewhere, were you?"

"I'm just closing up, is all," Marty answered through stiff lips. "Why? What's the beef now?"

"A little matter of a hot car," Dunlavy said. "Somebody phoned in and said maybe the police should take a look at a certain car on your lube-rack. The boys know I have a sort of a personal interest in you, so they passed it along to me. Come on. We'll take a look-see."

Marty's mouth was cotton-dry as he

[Turn page]



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accompanied Dunlavy back toward the rack. A hot car? In just a few seconds Dunlavy would see how blazing hot that car really was!

"Hey, what gives here?" Dunlavy exclaimed. "That's Judge Miller's coupé!"

He quickened his stride, and threw the car door open. He took a single glance at the body huddled on the seat, then started to whirl toward Marty, but he was too late. Marty had snatched a tire-iron from the rack. He brought it thudding savagely home against Dunlavy's head.

The big detective crashed backward against the coupé, slid off, and slumped to the ground. Marty knelt for a swift examination. Dunlavy's hat had absorbed part of the blow. He was out cold, but apparently not seriously injured.

Marty ran to his jalopy and tramped on the starter. He hit the street and headed east. Six blocks away, he slowed down. He was in a rundown industrial district, where vacant lots yawned frequently among sprawling frame buildings.

Most of the buildings were dark, but there were lights in the second-story windows of one in the middle of the block. Two cars were parked in front of it. One was Big Ed's sedan; the other was the blonde's convertible.

Luck was with him so far, Marty reflected. Big Ed was home, and he was in a building with whose layout Marty was thoroughly familiar. The lights came from a corner office room at the top of steps leading upward from a street door. The rest of the building was a large, cement-floored room used as a storage garage for trucks used in Big Ed's various enterprises.

Marty drove on past, parked the jalopy, and went back to an alley beside the building. Half-way along the alley there was a small side door. It was unlocked, just as Marty had expected. He slipped inside. He was in the main garage room. There was apparently nothing there hot enough to require a guard, for the place was dark and deserted.

Several large vans and half a dozen smaller closed-body trucks were on the floor. Marty checked the smaller ve-



hicles until he found one whose radiator was still warm. He opened the rear doors and climbed inside. It was empty except for a couple of long, heavy planks, probably used for unloading kegs. Marty turned the top plank over, then drew a deep breath of satisfaction at what his flashlight revealed.

He climbed down from the truck and headed for a door that opened into the front corner walled-in space below the office. It looked like an ordinary closet from the outside. Inside there was a steep flight of steps leading upward.

This was Big Ed's emergency exit. It connected with an opening in the back of a clothes closet in the office. That was the reason for the unlocked side door to the alley. If the emergency exit were ever used, there would be no time to bother unlocking doors en route.

MARTY climbed the steps, carefully pulled open a hinged panel of wall-board, and stepped out into a small closet. A chink of light came through a crack near the closed door to the office. He heard Big Ed Barlo's voice.

"A hundred and fifty trump and a hundred acres. Not a bad meld, huh?"

Marty tiptoed across the floor and put his eye to the crack. He was looking into a fair-sized room that was furnished for both comfort and utility. A table in the center of the floor was directly in his line of vision. Four people sat around the table, playing pinochle.

One was Big Ed; another was Mae Durand. The other two were long-time members of the mob, Dix Rendt and "Squinty" Erwin. Both were muscle men, but Dix was infinitely the more dangerous of the two. Squinty was notorious for possessing a streak that was saffron in color and a yard in width.

Big Ed played the hand and gloated as he made his bid. Mae picked up the deck and dealt. A nice cozy little card party, Marty reflected. Not a good enough alibi if the going got really tough, but good enough to get by routine questioning.

Marty sized up the layout and found nothing encouraging in it. Big Ed and Dix Rendt were almost certainly pack-

[Turn page]

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ing rods. Squinty probably had a sap. Marty had no weapon, and no apparent way of getting one. Now that it was too late, he thought regretfully of the gun that he could have stripped from Mike Dunlavy.

The game went on. Big Ed and Mae seemed to be genuinely enjoying themselves. Dix Rendt played with animal stolidity. Squinty Erwin was the only one who seemed to be under tension. The facial tic that had given him his name twitched almost constantly, and his narrow face was shiny with perspiration.

Squinty picked the deck up and nervously began shuffling. Then the cards slithered from his fingers and he started to get up from his chair.

"There's somebody comin' up the stairs!" he exclaimed. "Hear 'em?"

"So what?" Big Ed said. "We're just having a friendly little game of pinochle. Sit down, Squinty."

Big Ed's voice was soft, but there was something in his bulbous eyes that jerked Squinty promptly back into his chair. The knob turned, and the door opened sharply inward. The man who stood in the doorway while he scanned the room with hard, alert eyes was Mike Dunlavy.

For a moment Marty stared at the big detective in stunned surprise. Then he realized that Dunlavy's arrival was no mere coincidence. Dunlavy had seen Big Ed at Marty's place earlier in the evening so he had naturally headed for the mobster's headquarters as soon as he regained consciousness. Marty's lips tightened. This was a break that he could use.

"Well, well, if it isn't the law!" There was just the right amount of casual insolence in Big Ed's voice. "Don't bother knocking, Mike. Come right on in. Looking for somebody?"

Dunlavy stepped into the room. "Yeh," he said, "I'm looking for Marty Glidden. I want him for the murder of Judge Arden Miller."

Big Ed shook his head. "Well, whadda you know!" he exclaimed wonderingly. "So the little punk really made good on that loud talking he did when Miller sent him up. But why come here looking for him? I haven't seen him except

to say hello to since he got out."

"Yeah?" Dunlavy's voice was skeptical. "You don't mind if I look around, do you?"

Marty didn't wait for any more. He threw the closet door open.

"Looking for me, Mike?" he asked.

Dunlavy's big body had scarcely seemed to move, yet by some magic there was a .38 Police Positive in his right hand as he faced Marty. His eyes had the cold sheen of polished agate.

"So you did come running straight to the Big Shot, huh?" he commented.

"Hold it, Mike!" Big Ed protested.

"I didn't know the little punk was hiding in there. None of us knew it. Ain't that right?" He turned to the others for confirmation.

"Sure, it's right," Mae answered.

Dix Rendt nodded stolidly. Squinty Erwin swallowed hard, then nervously bobbed his head.

"Phooey!" Dunlavy said derisively.

"How could he get in there without you seeing him?"

"He didn't have to come through this room," Big Ed answered. "There's a back door to that closet."

"That's right, Mike," Marty said calmly. "The closet is a sort of an emergency exit of Big Ed's. There's a panel in its back wall and steps leading downstairs."

DUNLAVY shook his head.

"You birds will have to do better than that. If there was a back exit in there, this little fugitive from a murder rap would be ten blocks from here by now."

"I didn't lam, Mike," Marty said, "because I got no reason to. I didn't kill Judge Miller. I came here to get the dope on the guy who did kill him—and I got it!"

Big Ed stiffened momentarily, then relaxed. Mae's narrowed eyes resembled those of a crouching cat. Dix Rendt showed no emotion, but Squinty's sweaty face was twitching as though stung.

Dunlavy's eyes missed nothing as he studied the group.

"Keep on talking, Marty," he said

[Turn page]

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softly. "You begin to interest me."

"Okay," said Marty. "You saw Big Ed come into my station tonight, but you didn't see all that happened. He had ideas I should go back with his mob. I had other ideas. He got nasty and I hung one on his kisser. I didn't tell you that when you drove in because you wouldn't have believed me."

"No, I wouldn't have believed you," Dunlavy agreed. "I'm not saying I believe you now."

Marty shrugged his shoulders. "Take it or leave it. Anyway, he left to pick up some of his mugs and give me a working over. They must have got back in time to see Judge Miller when he drove his car in for a lube job. But I don't suppose you believe that the Judge would do that, either."

"He might have," Dunlavy grunted. "But never mind what I believe. Go ahead and speak your piece."

"Okay. The Judge left his heap with me and started walking to the bus stop at the corner of Kurtz. It's three dark and lonely blocks. Big Ed saw an unexpected chance to get the guy who was about ready to smash his rackets and send him up for a long stretch. And he could not only get him, but he could hang the job on a sap whose big mouth had already put him on the spot—meaning me.

"So they tailed the Judge," Marty continued, "and caved his skull in with a sap. They came back to plant the body on my place. Big Ed saw the Judge's car upon the lube-rack and he got a bright idea. If I found the body in the car up there, I'd really be stuck. Nobody would ever believe me when I told a yarn like that."

Marty nodded toward Mae. "They picked up the dame there and put the Judge's body in a light closed truck. While Mae kept me busy fussing around her convertible, they drove the truck into the back alley, put a plank across the fence from the top of the truck to the running-board of the coupé, and planted the body behind the wheel. Then when they got clear, they phoned the tip in so that I'd be caught before I could get rid of it."

Big Ed snorted. "You're not falling for that little punk's pipe dream, are

you, Mike?" he blustered. "Sure, we had a little argument when I dropped into his joint tonight. Maybe Mae came by later for gas. I wouldn't know. But all the rest of his yarn is pure baloney, without a scrap of proof of any kind!"

Dunlavy turned to Mae. "How about it, sister? Were you there?"

"Sure, I was there," the blonde spat. "I needed gas, and his station was right on my way here. Any reason why I shouldn't fill my tank there?"

Dunlavy turned back to Marty. "They're right, kid," he said thoughtfully. "You haven't given any proof to back up your yarn."

"I got plenty of proof," said Marty flatly. "I painted that back fence just this afternoon. When they carried the Judge's body across to the coupé, the plank sagged enough to come down on the top of the fence. You'll find that plank in one of the trucks downstairs, with a line of fresh green paint smeared on its bottom side."

"So what?" Big Ed countered disgustedly. "The only green paint in town ain't around that filling station. Those trucks have been a dozen places today they could have picked up a smear of fresh paint on a loading plank."

**Y**OUNG Marty Glidden shook his head. "Not like this paint, Ed. You wouldn't really know about paint. You didn't spend a stretch in the paint-shop up at the Big House like I did. No two brands of paint have the same chemical analysis. That plank in your truck might have got a smear of the same brand as mine somewhere else, if I'd used a standard brand—but I didn't. I mixed a batch up from odds and ends of several different brands and colors that were laying around the station. There isn't another batch of paint with exactly that same chemical analysis in town, or anywhere else."

"Maybe you got something, kid," Dunlavy said. "It won't take the police chemist long to find out."

"I've got what's left of the batch locked up in my safe waiting for him," Marty answered.

His eyes drifted briefly over Big Ed and his three companions. Squinty's

[Turn page]

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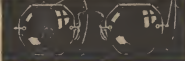
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narrow face was a sweat-shining study of stark panic.

"That smeared plank will hang the rap for the murder on these babies all right," Marty said confidently. "And as for the mug who did the actual killing—well, that ought to be easy. The sap expert of this mob has always been that squint-eyed monkey there!"

Squinty sprang to his feet. "It wasn't me!" he chattered frantically. "They used my sap, but it was Big Ed that—"

Big Ed's face purpled. "Why, you sniveling rat!" he snarled thickly.

He lurched to his feet, with his right hand clawing for a gun in a shoulder-holster. The next instant the entire room erupted into a swift blur of action.

Dunlavy's .38 crashed and Big Ed screamed. Dix Rendt's hand darted across his chest toward his holstered gun. Marty snatched for the only possible weapon within reach, the flashlight in his hip pocket. He hurled it just as Rendt's gun came into sight.

The heavy cylinder thudded solidly into Rendt's temple. His knees buckled. Before he could recover, Marty was upon him. His right fist crashed into Rendt's jaw. Rendt jack-knifed backward over his chair. His head struck the floor with a smashing impact that knocked him completely out.

Marty heard Dunlavy's voice. "Drop it, Mae! Drop it, baby, quick!"

Marty turned. Mae was frozen motionless, with a small automatic half out of her open hand-bag. She slowly relaxed her fingers and let the little gun drop.

Squinty was swaying on his feet, sobbing in terror, but apparently unhurt. Big Ed huddled in a chair, his face a mottled gray, and one hand clamped over a bullet-shattered shoulder.

Dunlavy tossed his handcuffs to Marty.

"Cuff Squinty and that she-cat together," he ordered. "Then phone the boys. Tell 'em to bring an ambulance with them."

Marty obeyed. When he turned from the phone, Dunlavy had collected the fallen guns and holstered his own.

"Nice job you did on Dix Rendt," Dunlavy commended. "And a nice piece of work about that paint gag. I believe



you really did learn something up there at the Big House, Marty."

Marty's lips twisted bitterly. The shadow of the gas-chamber was gone, but the shadows of the gray walls and the steel bars remained. Marty knew Mike Dunlavy too well to have any sappy ideas that that parole-shattering episode with the tire-iron was going to be overlooked.

Dunlavy shoved his hat back on his head, then winced as it rubbed his sore skull.

"Better fix that low beam back there by your lube-rack, Marty," he said. "I nearly knocked my brains out on it tonight."

Marty stared at him blankly for a moment. There was no beam near the lube-rack. Then he saw the expression on Dunlavy's face, and he got it. Relief surged over him in a mighty wave.

"I'll fix it first thing in the morning, Mike," he promised.

"Good," Dunlavy grunted. "And save a date for me along about noon. My private jalopy needs a grease job, and I'm a little particular about who I have work on it."

## NO DELAY, NO REST

(Concluded from page 97)

"Sure—he's my boy," Sergeant Bernard Dell declared just the least bit archly, and Buddy had a feeling from the way he said it that there might be no licking this time. "The kid spilled sugar he was carrying—left a trail of it from across the street directly into this place. That's how we knew."

"But—but how did yuh know what that meant—or was?" the thief stammered.

Sergeant Dell paused slightly, and Buddy held his breath.

"There was a little green card at the beginning of the trail," the officer said then. "A Junior G-men card with his name on it."

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## HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 9)

men back in the shadows of the hotel room. He counted them. Three of them. They stood there, silent. They all wore long topcoats.

Ted stared in disbelief. He must be in the middle of a nightmare. He shuddered, stared more intently. No, there they were!

And each of them was holding a gun!

Why they were there, how they had got there, and what happened to Ted Bixby will be answered in the next issue of our favorite magazine, which happens to be **THRILLING DETECTIVE**. Be on hand for a fast and furious trip through the underworld with the best mystery writers of America!

We'll be back again with another **HEADQUARTERS**, and in addition to next issue's three big headliners there will be a full docket of thrilling short stories for your delectation—if you can interpret the best detective tales in such fancy language!

## OUR LETTER BOX

**U**SUALLY our readers are so busy falling in and out—and remaining in—love at this Springtime of the year that the mail falls off and the editor gets an opportunity to go fishing. But this year something seems to have happened to the lovelorn, and the mail keeps us so busy that we can't get time to dig worms. So let's get right into the correspondence without any more small talk.

I am anxiously awaiting another Scotland Yard story like **THE MYSTERY MAN OF SOHO** by Margery Allingham. It isn't often one finds stories about the most famous of all police organizations in American magazines. My congratulations.—Stella Bruce, Vancouver, B.C.

That was certainly a swell story by C. S. Montanye in **THRILLING DETECTIVE**, the one called **MAKE MINE MURDER**. I also liked **DIAL M-U-R-D-E-R** by John L. Benton, who thought up a clever title.—Peter L. Simons, Brooklyn, N.Y.

I thought the Thompson Burtis opus **THE CENTER OF THE STAGE** in **THRILLING DETECTIVE** a terrific yarn. The characters in the story both good and bad, made me think of several of our popular movie stars and also brought to mind a couple of well-

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known seditionists. All in all a timely and fascinating story.—*Wilma Harris, Meridan, Conn.*

As an old freshwater fisherman, I particularly enjoyed Bill Anson's short story **DEATH BAIT**. The solution was clever and even I, who know all there is to be known about trout flies, didn't guess the key to the puzzle until the very last. A neat little package, Mr. Anson. How about some more?—*Bob Ganz, Tucson, Ariz.*

I often have wondered if I wrote a letter to **THRILLING DETECTIVE** whether it would be printed, so here goes on a wild chance. First I want to say that I think the best thing in the magazine is **OUR LETTER BOX**. You get close to the readers, whether you like what they say or not. I hate to criticize severely, but I don't like stories that are too long. I like novelets and not novels.—*Samuel Brooks, Boston, Mass.*

Give us some more stories by Linklater, Montanye, and Manners.—*Harry S. Pellman, St. Paul, Minn.*

That's all for now, but there'll be more letters next issue. Meanwhile, thanks everybody, for your fine epistles, and please keep on writing us. Don't forget to address your postcard or letter to The Editor, **THRILLING DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. We'll be waiting anxiously to hear from you.

So long and good luck.

—THE EDITOR.

## THE EGG IN THE BIER

(Concluded from page 79)

faced desperation. She never did get the gun clear. Swift took it away from her.

Just before she went away with Swift she told me what she thought of me. It wasn't pleasant. And I'd thought I was really making time with her! Swift called me later and reported that Big Boy had opened up like a tulip on a spring morning.

I had figured it out right. Big Boy revealed that one of the payroll delivery boys had shot his mouth off to Flame. That's how Tony had been able to plan the robbery.

I thought about Flame in prison, and I knew I had better go away for a little vacation. If I didn't, I knew I would deal with Swift and get her out. Red-heads don't belong in jail, and Flame was too lovely for hard cots and gingham dresses. I went to Miami.

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# MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING—

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BY GROUCHO MARX



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On second thought, you'd better keep on saving, chum. Otherwise you're licked.

For instance, how are you ever going to build



that Little Dream House, without a trunk full of moolah? You think the carpenters are going to work free? Or the plumbers? Or the architects? Not those lads. They've been around. They're no dopes.

And how are you going to send that kid of yours to college, without the folding stuff?

Maybe you think he can work his way through by playing the flute.

If so, you're crazy. (Only three students have ever worked their way through college by playing the flute. And they had to stop eating for four years.)

And how are you going to do that world-traveling you've always wanted to do? Maybe you think you can stoke your way across, or scrub decks. Well, that's no good. I've tried it. It interferes with shipboard romances.

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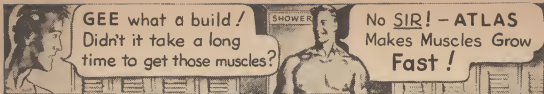
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